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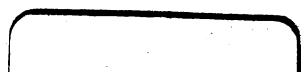
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OLGA'S CRIME

WORKS BY FRANK BARRETT

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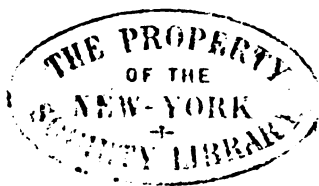
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OLGA'S CRIME

BY
FRANK BARRETT

AUTHOR OF

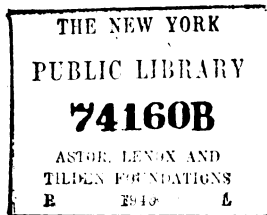
"THE SMUGGLER'S SECRET," "FETTERED FOR LIFE," ETC., ETC.



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OLGA'S CRIME.

CHAPTER I.

REDEEMING THE PAST.

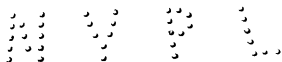
"WOLVES or Cossacks?"

The driver stood up in the fore part of the sledge, steadying himself with his whip hand by the leather hood which protected his passengers—a man in a conical Tartan cap of astrachan, overlapped at the ears by the collar of a huge sheep-skin coat, with no visible features but a pair of ferret eyes, a red snub nose, and a bristling mustache, rigid with his frozen breath. With a shake of the reins and a guttural scream he put the three horses to a gallop, and then turned sharply to scan the plain behind.

Nothing there but a vast undulating sweep of snow, stretching away without visible break to the black sky which sharply defined the horizon, and the diminishing line of telegraph poles marking the track through the desert: Nothing save a tiny patch beyond the vanishing point of the telegraph poles, which might have been a bush or a rock.

One of the passengers crept out from the interior of the sledge and stood up beside the driver. As he rose to his feet the hood struck back his fur cap. His hair on one side of the head hung in long black wisps; on the other it was cropped short. It needed but that to show that he was a "brodyag"—an escaped Siberian convict.

"What is it?" he asked. "I see nothing," after looking across the snow for a minute in silence.



"Beyond the telegraph poles," answered the driver, pointing with his whip.

The passenger bent his black eyebrows and fixed his eyes intently. "Beyond the patch of trees?" he asked.

"Watch that. If it is a patch of trees, you will cease to see it in five minutes; if it grows bigger, you may know it for wolves or Cossacks."

He watched till pink flames seemed to leap from the blinding snow, but through them he saw the patch still grow larger and more distinct. He turned, looking slowly round the horizon, despite the icy blasts that struck like a flight of needles upon the sensitive skin about his eyes. Nothing there but that vast plain of snow under the leaden canopy of cloud and the line of telegraph poles thinning down to a thread in the distance. "How far is it to a village?" he asked, thinking of wolves.

"Thirty versts."

Over twenty miles to go and the horses nearly spent!

"And the woods?" asked the brodyag in desperation, thinking of Cossacks.

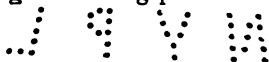
"Fifty. Before we are half the distance Cossacks or wolves will overtake us."

The driver threw himself down in his seat screaming at the horses, and cracked his whip in a long volley over their heads. With despair in his face, the passenger crept back under the hood. On the further extremity of the straw which formed a seat sat his father, an old man with a long silvery beard and closed eyes; next to him his daughter, a young girl with a thin, care-worn face, low-growing, chestnut-red hair, and under her fine black eyebrows eyes made more lustrous large and dark by uncertain terror.

She could not speak for fear, but as her father seated himself and drew up the skins for warmth to still the convulsive trembling that shook him like an ague, she put her hand upon his arm and looked appealingly into his face.

"It will be all over in an hour," he said. "We can't escape. Wolves or Cossacks, it hardly matters which we fall to. As well to be torn to pieces by the beasts as to be taken back to the mines and the prison."

"Better," said the girl, bending her head, as she thought with loathing of the overcrowded Kamras, those loathsome dens serving as halting-places for prisoners on the



road to Siberia, where men and women are penned up with nothing but the foul floor for a resting-place, and in an atmosphere laden with the stench of typhus and corruption.

"God of Israel!" muttered the man, in a tone of bitter imprecation.

The driver got upon his feet again. Father and daughter sat as if spellbound, waiting for the verdict to come from his lips. They were not kept long in uncertainty.

"Cossacks!" said the driver, at the first glance backward.

The father caught his daughter's hand and strained it to his heart, as if the end had already come. Only the old man seemed unmoved by the terror of their situation. His attitude of philosophic calm, of stoic resignation, was unchanged. He was the first to speak when the driver, seated again, had expended his energy in shrieking at the horses and cracking his whip.

"Petrovitch is a liar," he said. "There is a chance of escape, or he wouldn't waste his breath upon the horses. The wind is fuller on my face. What does that mean, Laban—you who have eyes?"

"It is true: we are swerving from the track."

The driver, questioned, pointed his whip to windward, where the line of the horizon was lost and the plain faded imperceptibly into the clouds, and said—

"A storm is coming. If we can reach it before the Cossacks reach us we may escape."

"Then why make this long curve? Why not strike across in a straight line?"

"I know what I'm about," growled the driver. "My skin's as good as yours, to me. While we seem to be following the road they'll stick to the poles, and every yard is a gain to us. A sudden turn would betray us, and they'd cut across to intercept us: there we should lose."

The wiry little horses kept to their pace; the runners of the sledge rang on the frozen snow; their distance from the lines of poles widened; the cloud grew black over their heads and nearer; now and then a flake of snow swept under the hood—a welcome forerunner of the coming storm. Presently Petrovitch, after craning out to windward, abruptly turned his horses into the teeth of the wind. The Cossacks had discovered their intention, and

were crossing widely from the track to intercept them.

Leaning forward, Laban and his daughter made them out distinctly—a body, ten or a dozen strong, heading directly on their course. If there had been any doubt as to their purpose before, there could be none now: they were clearly in pursuit.

The air was thickening with snowflakes. Occasionally a gust, laden with piercing ice points, met them with such fury that the horses seemed unable to make way against it. The hood caught the wind like a sail, opposing a force almost equal to that of the straining horses. With each rebuff they lost ground.

"Another squall like that and the Cossacks will be upon us," said the driver. "Mind," he added, turning to the hood, "when they call to me I must stop."

The words came clearly enough to them, but when Laban strove to reply, the wind stifled his voice in his throat. Packing the skins closer about his daughter, who seemed to be losing consciousness under the benumbing influences of the driving wind and an inevitable fate, Laban crept out to the side of Petrovitch. The nearest Cossack was not a hundred yards behind.

"You must turn your deaf ear to the Cossacks, Petrovitch," he called.

"It won't pay," answered the man, shaking his head. "I've done my best."

"But it will pay. Only get us to Vladivostock."

"Vladivostock," grunted the driver, with a sniff and a jerk of the head. "What will you give now?"

"We have nothing now—not a rouble. You've had all—every kopeck."

"So much the worse for you."

"For mercy's sake, Petrovitch! Have you no pity for a blind old man and a helpless girl?"

"As much pity as you have. Look you, it's easier for you to save them than for me."

"How?"

"The horses are spent. The load is more than they can drag. Lighten it."

"Lighten it!" echoed Laban, faintly, with a perception of the man's meaning.

"It's you—not the old man and the girl—they're after. Drop out: the Cossacks will have all they need, and I promise to save your father and daughter."

Laban turned his eyes upon the old head and the young bent before the fury of the storm, and realized for the first time, now that it was so close at hand, the meaning of death—the breaking away of heart from heart, the end of all earthly love and hope. In that moment, like a flash, the thousand miseries they had endured passed across his remembrance and nerved his quivering heart with a force to redeem his past. The misery he had brought upon his child was not to be undone, but misery of the future might be averted by one last unselfish act. Merely to meet his fate a little earlier was not much, yet how hard to do; He yearned at this last moment to go in and touch his child's hand again, but the hoarse shout of a Cossack calling upon the driver to stop warned him that there was no time even for "farewell," and, without a word, he rose to his feet and sprang out upon the snow.

Sensible of a difference in their load, the horses bounded forward, and plunged bravely through a very wall of snow borne along on a whirling blast. When the blinding drift had passed, Petrovitch, looking back, could hardly distinguish the Cossacks in the snowy whirlwind that enveloped them. An officer alone had charged through the vale of snow and kept up the pursuit.

Urged by fear, by greed of gain, or by some better motive, Petrovitch did his best to get away, and lent his deaf ear to the shout of the officer, now close upon him. But the loose snow clogged the sledge, the horses could go no further, and now, within a couple of yards of the cowering driver, the officer levelled his revolver and fired.

With a scream, Petrovitch threw up his arms, and, falling sidelong from the sledge, spattered the white snow with his life blood.

CHAPTER II.

THE REFUGEES.

"Who is that good-looking, middle-aged man with the dark eyes and mustache?"

"David McAllister."

"A Scotsman?"

"Yes, with a large percentage of Jewish blood in his veins."

"Looks an able man."

"He is. A man of great ability—great adaptability especially. He attributes his success in life to that. Most of us have a couple of identities. The man in business and the man in his house or at his club are separate individuals. McAllister has at least three personalities. In Onslow Square, where he lives, he is Mr. David McAllister, an excellent husband and father, an admirable host, with an inexhaustible fund of reliable information, which makes him an invaluable acquaintance to a crowd of people far above him in the social scale. In Fleet Street he is known simply as McAllister, editor of the *Financial Guide*; on 'Change he is still McAllister, a clear-headed, careful Scot. But, east of Bishopsgate Street, McAllister disappears, and he is known only as Mr. David, the Jew philanthropist and reformer. He has pulled down one half of the Jewish quarter, and intends to pull down the other half. Ten years ago Petticoat Lane and the network of slums about it were the vile nursery of disease and crime; now—well, you should just see his lodging-houses for the poor."

"Makes philanthropy pay, I suppose?"

"He says it does, and that's the greatest incentive one can give to the cause of humanity and paupers."

Leaving his brougham in Bishopsgate Street, Mr. David McAllister walked up Widegate Street to the office of his work in Sandy's Row. Passing through the outer office, in which four or five clerks were busily occupied behind a long desk, he perceived an old man with a white beard, in a long fur coat, seated in an attitude of stolid patience beside a young woman, whose face was concealed by a thick veil of crape. Without pausing he passed into his private room, followed by Mr. Phillips, his managing clerk.

"Morning, Mr. David, sir," said Phillips, softly closing the door. "The two parties outside want to see you. They've been waiting pretty near three hours. I don't know what their business is; I think they are Russians, sir—Zassoulitch, or some such name."

Mr. David nodded comprehensively, and said, "Wait a minute, Phillips," as he seated himself before his table and unlocked the drawer.

He took out a pile of letters and turned them over one by one until he came to a sheet written in a particularly neat Hebrew hand. This he detached and read through carefully. It was from Benjamin Zimmerman, a correspondent in Hamburg—a letter of advice preparing him for the visit of the Russians who were now waiting in the office to see him. It is a great saving of time to a business man to know beforehand the kind of people he has to deal with, and frequently it obviates misunderstanding.

"You can show them in now, Phillips," he said, having read the letter through; and as his manager withdrew he folded the letter and put it in an inner pocket, replacing the rest in the drawer and turning the key upon them.

Phillips re-entered, admitting the visitors. On the threshold the old man uncovered, murmuring a word in Hebrew, and the young woman raised her veil. Mr. David McAllister, who had a nice taste in art, was struck by the picturesque tableau before him. It reminded him of the well-known picture of the Blind Beggar, with this difference—that the blind man was even more noble in appearance and the girl infinitely more beautiful than the subject of that over idealized painting. They seemed to compel homage, and he bowed low, dismissing Phillips with a glance as he raised his head.

"My grandfather, this is Mr. David McAllister," said the girl, leading the old man forward. Her voice was low and musical, and she spoke English with a little difficulty over the *th*, but with a slow, clear articulation of each syllable that harmonized with her air of delicate refinement.

The old man drew a letter from his breast and held it out, raising his head as if seeing a ray of light.

"I am not yet used to the dark. I am blind. Pardon me," he said, with a foreign accent even less noticeable than his granddaughter's, "I have the honor to present this letter to you; it is from Mr. Benjamin Zimmerman, of Hamburg."

"Zimmerman—an old friend of mine. Be seated, I beg."

David McAllister placed a chair for the old man and then another for the young lady with unusual embarrassment. Her beauty was bewildering. Never had he seen such deep, pathetic eyes, a face so exquisitely modelled, a brow so like the classical ideal, with low, rippling lines of chestnut hair. It might become even yet more beautiful when

the sunken cheek filled out ; but the trace of suffering and care in the young face added to its interest in Mr. David's opinion. He opened the letter and read it half aloud—

"Great pleasure in recommending to your generous sympathy Mr. Ivan Zassoulitch and his granddaughter Olga whose terrible experiences in escaping from Siberia will undoubtedly excite the interest and arouse the indignation of all who respect humanity and condemn the infamous practice of despotic power. When you have heard from their own lips the story of their wrongs, I am certain you will employ your influence to reinstate them in that social position from which they have been displaced."

David McAllister closed the letter with some commonplace words of sympathy and surprise : the old man interrupted him—

"Wait till you have heard of my wrongs, then judge if we are unworthy of your help. I am Ivan Zassoulitch : this is Olga my grandchild. We lived in Moscow. We were rich—not alone in worldly possessions but in the love of many friends and the respect of all who knew us. I had a son and this poor child a father. She is now an orphan, and except this child I have nothing in the wide world but what I owe to the charity of your friend Zimmerman.

"It came about in this way. My son was suspected of complicity in a political intrigue. One evening the police made a descent upon us. We were then at our country house near the source of the Volga : it was summer. They came in from the garden through the open window. We gave up our keys, my son and I, but our poor child, Olga, terrified out of all reason, attempted to conceal a photograph of Vera Figuer, on which were a few words written to her friend by that unhappy girl the day before her arrest. Look at my grandchild ; you will see that she cannot dissemble."

David McAllister glanced at Olga. The girl sat as if overcome with the painful recollections of the past—her head bowed, the fingers of her folded hands twitching nervously upon her lap.

"Her face betrayed her ; her hand was on her bosom. The officer, a young man, regardless of her age and sex, seized her by the arm, and made a brutal attempt to search her. My son, wrought to fury by this outrage, caught up a knife from the table, attacked the wretch, and rescued

Olga. The police set upon him. He was overpowered and carried away a prisoner with his daughter. What I, an old man, could do I did. I appealed to the governor. Pointing to the photograph of Vera Figuer, he said that justified the action of the police, 'but nothing,' added he, 'can justify your son's attack upon an officer of the Czar.' I spoke my mind plainly to him. To my friends outside I appealed for help, with a result that might have been foreseen.

"As I was leaving my house for Moscow, I was arrested and thrown into prison with my children. Hoping to be tried, that we might prove our innocence of any plot against the Government, we lay in prison three months; then came the administrative order, by which we were deprived of all civil rights and without even the form of a trial sentenced to imprisonment for life in the mines of Kara. In a gang, composed chiefly of felons, thieves, murderers, and villains of the lowest and most repulsive kind, we started in the autumn on that awful march of over three thousand miles. The only difference made in our treatment was that in deference to our rank, we were spared the agony of marching in irons, and when this poor child and I could no longer walk, we were put with the sick in telepas—carts without springs—but when the day's march was ended we fared with the rest.

"When we reached a station the gang was disbanded. Then followed a rush like the stampede of wild beasts, the strong beating down and trampling over the weak in the struggle to get a place on the sleeping bench. Near upon two thousand people were penned in dens to accommodate eight hundred. Oh! the stench of those *étapes*—the loathsome uncleanness——"

"No, no!" remonstrated Olga, laying her hand imploringly upon the old man's arm.

"Enough, my child. I will say no more. But I must speak—humanity must know of these things."

"Not now."

"So be it. It was winter when we reached Siberia. One day the glaring snow grew black. I thought I had been left there alone. I could see no one. I was blind. My reason seemed to be going with my sight. I was a month in a lazaretta. Then we marched again on that route that appeared to have no end—Olga and I—until we reached Kara and rejoined my son. He had news for

us. Our friends in Moscow had not forgotten us. The Princess Radozski had sent out her steward, a man named Petrovitch, with money and certain papers to enable us to escape. This Petrovitch was a thief and a liar."

"But we did not know it then," said Olga, raising her head. Mr. David bowed.

"No; he deceived us from the beginning to the end," continued the old man bitterly. "The princess had obtained an order to allow us to circulate freely in Siberia—a tacit permission, in fact, to escape from the country if we could. These papers were strictly in order, signed by the authorities at St. Petersburg; but Petrovitch for his own purpose, led us to believe that they were forged, and only to be used with great caution. This gave him a certain power over us; we dared not question his movements, nor object to any scheme he proposed, for fear of being denounced."

"But what motive had he for deceiving you?" asked McAllister, with an air of perplexity.

"The desire to profit by our misfortunes—the motive which makes every functionary in Russia, private or public, a merciless thief. The man knew that, though all our possessions in Russia were confiscated, we had money invested abroad. With the means provided by the Princess Radozski, he might have taken us directly to Vladivostock; but, under the pretence of seeking safety, of avoiding dangers, he led us in other directions. What could we do? We had no chart; no means of helping ourselves—we were absolutely at his mercy. Then he told us the funds supplied by the princess were exhausted, and he could not hope to get us away without fresh means.

"I wrote to my friends in Germany to send me all that they could raise in my name. Awaiting the reply, we bivouacked in the Taigee, the virgin forest of Siberia. It was summer then. When the money came it was autumn. Then we marched on again—whither we knew not. Sometimes we travelled on foot; sometimes in carts. When the winter set in we bought sledges and horses. The hardships we suffered, the adventures we passed through, would fill volumes. The money went till not a rouble was left, and still we seemed as far as ever from our journey's end. Great God! what could we do?"

The old man extended his trembling hand and raised

the lids of his sightless eyes—the living illustration of utter helplessness.

"My dear sir," said McAllister, in a tone of sympathy, "if you would reserve the continuation of this painful story——"

Zassoulitch replied by a quick negative movement of his expressive hands, and, composing himself with an effort, continued—

"Hear me out. I have little more to tell. Hearing no more from us or her steward Petrovitch the Princess Radoski became suspicious, and wrote to her friend the Governor of Irkutsk on the subject, and he circulated inquiries amongst the stations of the interior. A young officer got upon our track and followed us."

"We met him two times—three times," interposed Olga.

"And always with increasing apprehension. Petrovitch dreading his purpose led us to believe he was hunting us down and only waiting for help to come from an adjacent outpost to fall upon us and take us back to Kara. The second time we met was in a village. He saw our sledge in the inn yard and galloped off at once. 'He has gone for Cossacks,' said Petrovitch and he would not stay longer there than to feed the horses."

"We started in the middle of the night," said Olga.

"The next morning the Cossacks were upon us. Petrovitch flew to save himself. The officers overtook us in a storm of snow, and shot Petrovitch dead. We were half stifled with the snow—stupefied with the cold and privation and terror; but that shot brought us to our senses, and Olga there, poor child, sprang up crying like one quite mad, 'My father! my father!' thinking it was he who had been shot. He was gone; but he had met another fate—my dear son. He had thrown himself from the sledge to save us, believing that the Cossacks would let us go if they secured him—as wolves give up the chase when food is thrown to them. That storm was terrible. Those with eyes could see nothing while it lasted, and when it was past, my son was found deep under the snow, dead."

The old man's voice fell as his chin sank upon his breast, the last word being scarcely audible. McAllister turned from him to his grandchild. A tear was dropping from her pale cheek. He rose, and in a low voice, and a few well-chosen words, expressed his deep sympathy.

"You must suffer me to help you," he said in conclusion. "There is my card ; while we are in London, consider our house your home. I speak for my wife and daughters, who will make up for my want of address. I am only a plain man of business, you know. We shall hope to see you at Onslow Square at the earliest time convenient to you. Meanwhile, my manager, Mr. Phillips, whom I will send to you, will supply you with all that is necessary to your immediate wants."

On his way westward, Mr. David McAllister, settling himself in the corner of his hansom, took out that private letter of advice from Benjamin Zimmerman, and read again a certain portion of it :—

"How much of their story is true, I don't know ; but this is certain. Ivan Zassoulitch is the blind poet, Isaakoff, who posed as a Polish Homer twenty years ago. They were sent to the mines *not* for political reasons, but for the daring robbery of the Princess Radozski's diamonds. They were all, I believe, implicated in that business—certainly the father and son. Fortunately for them, with the diamonds they took some letters which compromised the princess. The papers were sent on to me. To recover them, the princess aided them through her steward, Petrovitch, to escape from Kara. Petrovitch doubtless acting upon instructions from the princess, took care Isaakoff did not get out of Siberia while the letters were wanting, and the old impostor had to write to me for them. They were given up. But that wasn't enough ; the princess, as *rusée* as they were, never intended them to get away, and probably Petrovitch would have led them about until they perished in the snows of Siberia had not a young officer, smitten with the beauty of Olga Zassoulitch stopped his game, and got them out of the country at his own expense.

"Knowing all this, it struck me that these were just the sort of people you could turn to profitable account."

There was a postscript, which also he read a second time : "The demand for good stuff is still in excess of supply. If there are any crystals in the market now is the time to sell."

What did this reference to the demand for diamonds mean ? There seemed to be no doubt as to the meaning of the paragraph in the mind of Mr. David McAllister as he leant back in the hansom and mused with half closed eyes.

CHAPTER III.

A CHOICE OF EVILS.

WHEN the door of his private office closed behind David McAllister, Ivan Zassoulitch stretched out his hand tentatively towards Olga, and she took it in hers. A casual observer, if any had been there, would have seen nothing in this clasp of hands but an instance of dependence and affection; it would, indeed, have needed a sharp eye to detect the tap of a finger by which the old man asked, "Are we alone?" or the pressure of a thumb by which the girl responded, "Yes."

The signal exchanged, Olga's hand dropped heavily by her side. Then, and not till then, Ivan's venerable features relaxed, and their expression of stern severity gave place to one of cheerful hope, as he nodded his head briskly and rubbed one hand over the other in the manner of a man released from a long condition of restraint.

Olga's pathetic look and attitude of fixed despondency remained unaltered. The weary care in a face so young was not less incongruous than the buoyancy in that of her grandfather—a sightless face, scarred and seamed by a thousand biting misfortunes.

Suddenly he ceased to rub his hands, and raising a finger, turned his ear towards the door as he caught the sound of McAllister's voice in the office beyond; as suddenly he folded his hands upon his knee and dropped his chin in dejection upon his breast when he heard a sharp step approaching the door. At the same time Olga instinctively straightened herself as if in protest against her grandfather's degrading self-abasement.

Mr. Phillips entered, hat in hand—a sharp, ferrety little man, with the irrepressible assurance of one who has no doubts of his own abilities.

"I've got to apologize to you, my lady—excuse me if I don't address you in the proper style—and to you likewise, sir, for being a little off-hand with you before the

governor turned up, but, you see, I didn't know your rank—"

"Rank!" exclaimed Ivan, bitterly. "What is rank to the outcast?"

"Well, sir, you'll find it goes a pretty long way in this country. We've got some outcasts among us, chiefly from the German Court, who came over here, with nothing but their titles, and they seem to do pretty well, I can tell you. They top it over our own needy nobility, that they do, specially in the Army and Navy. Oh, there's a very large field here for aristocrats of all kinds, particularly anything new. Now, there's nothing in your line about. I haven't heard of any Russians being hoisted up—if I may use the expression—by the Court. Society seems very hard up for recruits, and society is always on the lookout for novelties. We've got one or two American bacon-curers, a Hungarian money-lender, a few parties from the music halls, and I do hear that one liter'y gentleman has been taken up; but there's no real worth. You're bound to make a hit, if I may venture to say so—can't fail. You look as if you had a right to a position, whereas those Germans have got a kind of look—don't you know, my lady?—as if they felt they ought to be ashamed of themselves."

Old Zassoulitch, quickly perceiving the character of the man now to be dealt with, suddenly abandoned the abject air, and now sat the personification of dignity in adversity.

"And then," concluded Phillips, with pride, "you've got the governor to back you up."

"I have heard that your master is a man of great influence," said Zassoulitch.

"Lord bless you, sir!" Phillips tossed his head, and for a moment was silent in his unspeakable admiration of David McAllister. "There's not such another man in London. He's hand in glove with everybody—can't do without him. His tremendous wide connection, and his position in the Money Market, open every source of information to him. Nowadays reliable information is the secret of success, and men of all sorts with a position to hold or to make must have it, and they know it's to be got from the governor. It's a treat to me to go up to Onslow Square on one of the governor's big evenings just to see the carriages rolling up to the door and the big swells going into his house. You'd think he was Prime

Minister, or some notorious party, and I'm proud to say to myself, 'That's my governor.' Beg your pardon for running on like this," he said, breaking off apologetically, "but my feelings carry me away when I begin to talk on that subject. Well, sir, now to business. The governor's given me a free hand and told me to supply all your immediate requirements—'immediate requirements,' those are his words. If you will please to tell me what you want."

"Want!" exclaimed Zassoulitch. "We want everything."

"That's a pretty large order," observed Phillips, with a smile and a sidelong look under his lifted eyebrows at Olga, as he drew his coat-sleeve over his shiny hat. "However, we must make a beginning somewhere. Have you got an hotel, sir?"

"We came here straight from the docks where we were landed."

"I suppose you didn't trouble to bring any luggage with you?"

"We have nothing—nothing but the wretched clothes we stand in."

"They won't do for Onslow Square, certainly."

"We have too much self-respect to present ourselves in any gentleman's house in such a condition."

"That's right enough, sir; and I've got too much self-respect to let you, also. When the governor said, 'These Russian nobles will visit me at Onslow Square, supply them with everything for their immediate requirements suitable to their rank,' he knew I should see the thing done properly or not at all. Now, what you want," he continued, drawing back and stroking his cheek reflectively as he surveyed the old man from top to toe, "is a reg'lar swell outfit—everything complete and first-class. You'll have to be provided with luggage, too—portmantaus, silver-mounted dressing cases, and travelling boxes for you, miss; now," taking his chin between his fingers and thumb, "how is it to be done?"

The old man replied by a gesture of helplessness, shrugging his shoulders and turning up the palms of his hands.

"The thing must be done well."

"If it is done at all," said the old man with much dignity.

"My own words, sir, turned about. At the same time,

we don't want to put the governor to unnecessary expense."

"I hope one day to be in a position to repay all that we owe."

"An extra reason," observed Phillips, dryly, "for being as economical as possible." He looked inside his hat in silent meditation for a moment; then, giving it a sharp twist, continued, "The governor, you know, hates anything like the appearance of ostentation. I'm sure he would very much dislike to hear people say, 'What a generous man! See what he's done for these poor people who came over without a penny in the world.'"

"And certainly we do not wish to pose as objects of charity."

"Ah! I'm glad to hear you say so, sir. I was not quite sure about it," observed Phillips, recollecting the old man's demeanor before the interview with David McAllister. "You see, I'm thinking about this outfit. If you don't want all the world to know your position, it won't do to go into society with the seams showing in your things, just as they've been handed down from the shelves of the ready-made goods department. Linen and that sort of thing must be new; but for dressing-cases, trunks, your own things, and my lady's dresses, I should think it advisable to go in for first-class second-hand stuff. I know a party who deals in that kind of thing. All first-class articles—only been worn once. Better than new, and fit you like a skin. And as you wear black, miss——"

Zassoulitch raised his shaggy eyebrows, then waived his objections with a movement of the hand.

"There's another advantage about that," added Phillips. "You can return the things when you've done with them, and then you'll only be indebted for the loan."

Zassoulitch concealed his feelings at this unlooked-for arrangement under a silent bow of acquiescence.

"Well, then, you know, you can't very well go in that style without servants. You ought to have a nice serious attendant, and my lady a maid. Now let me see if I can think of anybody who would accept a temporary engagement of that sort. There was a nice, clean, genteel young fellow about thirty, who left the French Ambassador's to marry and set up a business. They haven't made it answer. Now I daresay, to oblige me, they'd do it. Suit you to a T—wonderful well-behaved sort—

never open their mouths about anything. I'll look 'em up this afternoon. How will that suit you, sir?"

"We are in your hands."

"Very good, sir. Now in the matter of immediate requirements," with a glance at the old man's hands and soiled clothes. "What do you say, sir, to a wash and a brush up? Perhaps," turning his eyes upon Olga's fatigued face, "it wouldn't be amiss to go at once to an hotel."

"If you please," said Olga, speaking for the first time.

"I'll go and fetch a cab 'mediately. Shan't keep you waiting above two or three minutes."

As the door shut, Olga, drawing near the old man, took his hand and said quickly, speaking in Russian, and in a low voice—

"What are we to do for this? You have not asked that yet."

"Peace, child, peace," the old man answered, impatiently disengaging his hand, setting his elbows on his knees, and resting his chin on his clenched hands. "I want to think—I want to think."

Olga waited a minute, then touching his arm, she spoke again earnestly—

"We must know the price we have to pay for this."

"For what?"

"The things we are to be supplied with."

"Bagatelle, bagatelle," sneered the old man, rocking himself slowly from side to side without taking his chin from his hands, and with his brows knitted in thought.

"You have said no man does anything for nothing," Olga persisted.

"And I say it again. Do you think I'm cheated by a show of sympathy? They're clever, master and man alike. They'll pay themselves a rouble for every kopeck they spend on us."

"How?"

"That's their affair." Then, after a break with anger, begot, perhaps, by inability to answer the question to his own satisfaction, "Isn't it enough, fool, that we drag ourselves up out of the mire? What does it matter by what means, so that we don't drown in the filth?"

"And if the means fail as they failed before?"

"They shan't fail if you trust to me. They would not have failed before if your father had struck boldly. You've

nothing but his halting courage. Are you content with your condition? Have you no ambition to rise? Where is your pride?"

"Dead, dead," murmured Olga, bowing her head.

"It must be that," said Zassoulitch, numbling through his closed teeth, and taking no notice of Olga's silence.

"He thinks that our story will tickle the ears of these Londoners, bring a gaping crowd to his house to see us, increase his circle of friends, give publicity to his name. And what will it cost him—this *réclame*?—a trifle, nothing to the advantage it gives. That must be it."

"No more?" asked Olga, catching the sense of what he muttered.

"If there be more we can withdraw, should it suit us. Are you satisfied? Understand, you may ruin our chances by folly. You must play boldly to win, or lose all. And look what you may lose; a marriage that will ensure you a fortune for life—a position such as we have never held in our luckiest day."

"We begin with a lie, a theft," Olga murmured, after a minute's silence.

"What theft?" asked the old man, dropping his voice to a whisper.

"The theft of a name."

Zassoulitch stopped her with a cynical laugh. "The theft of princes," said he. "We travel incognito."

"And if we are discovered?"

"I have considered that possibility. It is small and far away. The Russians in London dare not countenance with their visits escaped political exiles. It would jeopardize their safety at home. They must avoid us. It will take months for our story to be questioned; if it is denied, who in a country hostile to Russia will believe the assertions of its suspected representatives? You know nothing of these things. You are a girl. Leave all to me."

"Suppose I find strength to take a course of my own?"

"Then take it, and with it my curse. Tell the world your grandfather is a thief. Tell the world that the police found your father and you no better, and see if they will treat you with more consideration for telling the truth. Go your own way if you will, and may that way lead you to dishonor and shame; a life of despair, a death of infamy."

He waited till the paroxysm of fury had passed ; then he muttered—

"One would think you had never known suffering."

"God knows I have—enough."

"Then take the compensation Heaven offers—ease, luxury, love, joy." He stopped abruptly, for the brisk step of Phillips was heard coming, assuming an expression of patient resignation.

"Cab at the door," said Mr. Phillips, cheerfully. Ivan rose at once, stretching out his hand to Olga. She sat motionless.

"Olga, my grandchild," said Ivan, in a tone of helpless supplication.

She rose and took his hand.

As they jolted slowly through that part of Middlesex Street where the Jews' market is held, Olga's senses were assailed by all the sights and sounds and vile odors which make that quarter loathsome. The dirt and squalor everywhere, the hoarse, guttural cry of hucksters, above all that peculiar sour rancid stench which is peculiar to the Jews' quarter, recalled to her mind the scenes in the terrible Kameras of Siberian *étapes*.

"Where are we ?" asked Ivan, leaning forward to make himself heard above the din.

"Old Petticoat Lane," shouted Phillips, in reply ; "it's where the poor live."

The old man nodded, and turning towards Olga, he said—

"Do you hear, my child ? *This* is where the poor live."

CHAPTER IV.

THE EXILES.

BEFORE the end of the week, Prince Ivan Zassoulitch (as he allowed himself to be called) and Olga made their appearance in Onslow Square. And a very good appearance they made, thanks to the resources of Mr. Phillips, the old man's shrewd foresight, and Olga's good taste. The

treacherous winds of early May countenanced the wearing of furs, without which they would have looked not nearly so rich or so Russian, and the bright sky permitted them to drive up in an open carriage.

They attracted attention all along the route by their distinguished air and those furs. Zassoulitch looked twenty years younger. He was no longer a distressful patriarch, but a noble exile, who, despite the persecution and confiscation of an unscrupulous Government, had saved sufficient from the wreck of his fortune to maintain himself and his grandchild presentably. The venerable locks that hung upon his shoulders were gone—cropped close—nothing left of them but a silvery sheen upon the remarkably well-developed head. The long beard that flowed down to the girdle of his peasant's tunic was now clipped to a neat, short, military point, and the mustache, which once mingled unobserved with his beard, now swept out detached in a magnificent upward curve.

He had straightened himself up and thrown his shoulders back to support the dignity of his new condition, and his attitude with an excellent silk hat, drawn rather low over his darkened eyebrows—a capital effect, the contrast between those dark eyebrows and the white mustache—his furs thrown open, and a faultless frock coat closely buttoned—one little ribbon in the button-hole, no more—gave him a distinctly martial, as well as a noble, presence. There was something of the old warrior, too, in his long eagle nose and the haughty, commanding severity of his countenance, in which the sole appeal now to commiseration was in the closed lids of his sightless eyes.

No such radical change was possible to Olga; nor was it desirable. Repose and the decent living of some four or five days had done as much as the hairdresser and the clothes dealer to improve her appearance. Her fine eyes, naturally pensive with the melancholy character of an Eastern race, had lost their weary heaviness; her complexion, still colorless, was brighter and healthier; and now that immediate suffering no longer pinched and compressed her features, her cheeks looked fuller, the curved upper lip lifted from the rounded nether revealing now and then a gleam of white teeth. Dress only served to emphasize her natural advantages—a perfectly fitting glove giving value to the delicate curve of wrist and finger, her furs making more remarkable the classical smallness of

her head, the elaborate dressing of her hair, with its closely pinned curls and the little fringe gathered in the middle of her forehead, giving play to the light and bringing out its coppery lustre.

On the box, beside the driver, sat Parker—the man induced by Phillips to accept a temporary engagement—the very model of a correct body servant : tall, slight, with a keen, alert face, a couple of inches of whiskers on each cheek, and a clean-shaven upper lip.

At a respectable distance behind came the carriage charged with the Zassoulitch luggage outside, and with Mrs. Parker and a few of the more valuable effects inside. Mrs. Parker was well matched with her husband—about thirty, rigid and bony, a face with furtive, quick eyes, and an expression of bad temper kept under restraint. The manner in which she held her mistress's jewel case in her lap, and kept comprehensive watch upon the carriage in advance, showed that nothing would be likely to get out of its place while she had the management of it.

As the carriage wheels scrunched over the newly mended road in Onslow Square, curious faces appeared at every window (where, in ordinary seasons, no face is ever visible), for it was already known that Mr. David McAllister was about to receive the visit of some very distinguished persons. And Ivan Zassoulitch and his grandchild answered all expectations. Mr. David McAllister had reason to smile as he welcomed them to his house and introduced them to his wife and two daughters.

The decisive step was taken ; there was no going back now. Olga realized that as she crossed the threshold, and she resolved that now she was on the path she would go on boldly. Virtually, she was compelled to yield to circumstances, for what young woman destitute in a foreign country, and under such conditions as hers, could strike out an independent course? But in abandoning herself to the current of events, she prepared to employ its force in carrying her to a safe haven if there were one.

Every marriageable woman speculates more or less on making a good match : it is the pre-eminent desire of their lives. It was something more than this to Olga : it was a necessity. She must marry, or sink to a condition of such horrible possibilities that she dared not think of it. And she must marry speedily ; she must change her

name legitimately before it was discovered that even that was borrowed, and not hers by right.

How was it to be done? She knew that she was beautiful; she might believe that dress and the position she was to assume would add to her attractions, but she felt that something else was needed. She must charm, not men only, for that would make enemies of sisters and mothers and be fatal to her hopes, but women as well. And so at the very outset she set herself to please.

It was but a family party at Onslow Square that first night, McAllister being doubtful about the ability of Zassoulitch and Olga—chiefly Olga—to sustain the parts they had to play. His doubts were completely dissipated before dinner was over. Ivan was gallant to the ladies, courtly and impressive in his dignity. Olga was simply bewitching. Exciting admiration from the first moment by her personal charms and the pretty accent and particular articulation with which she spoke English, she struck surprise at one moment by a witty rejoinder to some observation; at another, she drew pity by a brief reference to past suffering; and then she held them spellbound as she narrated a perilous episode in the escape from the mines.

In the drawing-room, when Mrs. McAllister asked if she sang, Olga took up a guitar with the sweetest inclination of the head, and sang the plaintive forbidden song, "On the hill by the Volga," with such intense and real pathos in her low contralto voice that, though the Russian words were not understood, their sense went direct to the hearts of those who listened, and while tears sprang in the girls' eyes, and fairly rolled down the cheeks of good old Mrs. McAllister, David himself felt his hair crisp and a thrill creep down his back. Mrs. McAllister—a stout, motherly, kind-hearted woman, who had married David when he was but a clerk and she a draper's assistant—and her daughters—who were, to a certain extent, as simple as she—were delighted.

McAllister, who kept his business and its workings a profound secret from his family, had simply told them that two distinguished Russian exiles were coming to spend a few weeks under their roof, and they had prepared to meet them with terrible misgivings, picturing them as the kind of people with whom it was necessary to be always on their best behavior. It was a charming dis-

illusion to find one of them at least so lovable and "nice."

And Olga—was she content with the part she played? Yes; there was very little acting in it. It was only at the first that any effort was required, and then no more than the best of us resort to under such circumstances. She was neither morose nor designing. It was natural to her to be amiable, and her heart went out towards the motherly old lady and the gawky, simple daughters—just as a bud seeking life and warmth expands under genial and natural influences. She desired no more than a life such as they led.

But that was not to be.

Business began the next morning when they went for a drive in the park—Zassoulitch and McAllister seated in the victoria *vis-à-vis* with Olga and Mrs. McAllister. McAllister saw no one—he was so deeply engaged in conversation with Zassoulitch. Every one saw him and the Russians. In the afternoon McAllister, with Olga and the two girls, went to see the pictures at Burlington House. In the crowded rooms, as they made their way, there was a hush, and all eyes were on Olga. Occasionally the silence was broken by a recognition between McAllister and friends, followed by a ceremonious introduction—all under the covert and open observation of the fashionable crowd. Then, after a brief exchange of courtesies, they pushed on again, Olga catching in the fleeting whispers "Princess," "That's she," "McAllister," "The Princess." Meanwhile, Ivan Zassoulitch, with Mrs. McAllister, assisted at a *matinée* of the Orpheonic Society, creating a sensation in another section of society. Every Saturday evening the doors of the house in Onslow Square were open to all visitors; but never had McAllister's rooms been crowded with such an assembly of representative men and women as they were this night. McAllister had told the romantic story of two noble political refugees, the moment he had heard from Phillips; that they had accepted his proposal definitively. The story like a snow-ball pushed along had acquired colossal proportions in a few days, and every one was eager to get the first glimpse of the "Prince" and his grand-daughter, who without doubt were to be the most remarkable persons of the season.

The excitement of the long day was too much for Olga. When it was all over she lay awake hour after hour with the crowd still surging before her, and the hum of mingled

voices in her throbbing ear, her exalted imagination magnifying the incidents that recurred to her memory and presenting visions of wildest possibilities in the aspect of probability.

Yet wild as these visions were, they scarcely outran the extravagance of society in its enthusiasm. Men and women raved about her beauty, her wit, her exquisite taste, her wonderful voice, her modesty and courage, her figure, her manners, her eyes, her hair—everything, in short, that could be observed and overrated, from her accomplishments—of which she had none—to her shoes, which were bought in the Westminster Bridge Road for 7s. 11d.

The gentlemen of the Press were not behindhand; they never are when there's a sensation to be worked. The *Times* began it with a column and a half describing the extraordinary escape from Siberia of the political exiles, Prince Zassoulitch and his grand-daughter; and the story was duly copied in the course of the week into three hundred and sixty-five country papers. The house in Onslow Square was besieged by reporters with confederate artists seeking to obtain interviews for the dailies and weeklies; and though they were courteously but firmly denied admission by McAllister, on the pretext that "the Prince" did not wish his private misfortunes to be made the subject of public debate, the reporters got copy for their papers all the same, and the artist waylaid the Russians in the park and got to work with his detective camera. "On the hill by the Volga" was in every shop where music was sold, with a portrait of Olga Zassoulitch on the cover and a lithograph of her signature in Russian underneath. Invitations poured in, and it was a matter of daily consultation with McAllister as to which might be declined.

In the very midst of their success, David McAllister received a telegram from Scotland summoning him to the death-bed of his mother. He took his departure without a moment's delay. Two days later a telegram came from him, informing his wife that Mrs. McAllister was dead, and intimating that she and the girls must come at once to be present at the funeral.

The blinds went down in Onslow Square, and it was made clear to Zassoulitch and Olga that they must leave.

Where were they to go? What was to become of them?

There seemed no alternative but to go back to Houndsditch and return their borrowed furs to the clothes dealer.

CHAPTER V.

HOMELESS AND HOPELESS.

ANY doubt Zassoulitch might have fostered about the necessity of quitting the comfortable quarters in Onslow Square were dispelled by a letter marked "private," which he received from McAllister by the next post to that which brought the news of his mother's death.

"My mother's sudden and unexpected demise," he wrote, "necessitates my staying in Scotland, if not permanently, at least until her residence is disposed of and her affairs wound up. I need not say how much I regret this abrupt termination to the brilliant series of receptions which I owe to the profound impression you have made on all ranks of society—receptions which not only gratified my vanity, but promised to yield substantial advantage in widening my circle of business acquaintance. I find, however, some consolation in the reflection that the numerous friends you have made in the past three weeks will extend hospitality to you and exert an influence in your behalf more permanently beneficial than any I could have hoped to provide. . . . Will you excuse the *brusquerie* of a plain man of business if, in conclusion, I beg to speak upon a delicate subject? As the forms of society may oblige you, in deference to my domestic affliction, to withdraw from the world for a few days, I have instructed my Mr. Phillips to see that you are accommodated in a suitable hotel and to discharge any obligations up to the 28th inst."

"What's to-day?" asked Zassoulitch, sharply, as Olga reached this point.

"The twenty-fourth."

"That gives us just four days," he said, with the eagerness of a man telling his last stake.

"And after that?" asked Olga, in suppressed terror.

Zassoulitch lifted his palms and shrugged his shoulders;

then, after a moment's silence, he turned sideways in his chair, rested his elbow on the back and his chin in the palm of his hand, and cursed the late Mrs. McAllister between his set teeth. Olga, sat with the letter in her lap, looking straight before her as she thought of the luxuries and delights to be given up, the golden possibilities to be abandoned, the shifts and miseries to be endured, the leaden despair to be faced.

They sat thus quite silent for awhile in the sitting-room, which communicated with their respective bedchambers. A short cough from Mrs. Parker, as she moved noiselessly about the room on the left, preparing her mistress's night toilette ; the sound of a brush in the other as Parker touched up his master's dress coat, alone broke the stillness. And it is safe to say that these sounds would not have been heard had these estimable servants understood the language in which Olga and her grandfather invariably conversed when alone.

"If she had only lasted out another week," growled Zassoulitch, "we might have done without the McAllisters. Come just at the wrong time. That American woman—what's her name?—was pretty nearly a certainty."

"That hideous, dry old thing, Miss Baggs?" asked Olga, with a pained compression of her beautiful dark eyebrows.

"Doesn't matter to me, my dear, how ugly she is—can't see her, thank Heaven. She may be old ; so much the better : wouldn't want a long engagement. And she may be dry, but I know she's rich. When I told her we were ruined, nothing left but a mere competence, she immediately informed me how many thousand 'bar'ls' of pork her agent had shipped last month, shook hands with me twice at parting, and the second time she regularly squeezed my hand—she's got a grip like—like silver. Confoundedly sentimental, to be sure, always wanting to cry ; that's her only fault—a fault," he shifted his position with a sigh, "which wouldn't have lasted long. She'd have cried enough by the end of the honeymoon, I'll warrant."

Zassoulitch also had made his mark, but in the midst of success he never lost sight of his necessities.

It had been otherwise with Olga. She had not picked out one man from the many who sought the depths of

her eyes as the one to make her husband. In the delicious forgetfulness of care and self-abandonment to the delight of the moment all self-seeking had gone from her heart if ever it had held place there. She had made a thousand rapturous admirers, but not one serious lover. The most innocent girl in society was not more free than she had been from sordid thought or designing action.

"What invitations have you got?" Zassoulitch asked, returning from ideal to practical considerations.

Olga opened the drawer at her side and brought out a bulky sheaf of letters.

"Read the names," said Zassoulitch, catching the rustle of paper. "I shall remember them."

"Charles Dexter Dunbar," Olga read, taking up the first letter that came to hand.

"They call him the Right Honorable Charles Dexter Dunbar. A Cabinet Minister in the late Government. Shrewd man—dangerous. Wants to know too much about Moscow society. Got me up in a corner with his questions about the military service of the nobles. Said something about the Russian Embassy, which led me to think they were acquainted. Pass that on—don't like the man."

"His son, Mr. Lesley Dunbar, is very nice," said Olga, lingering over the letter.

"What is he?"

"I don't think he is anything. I was told he had written a very clever article in a magazine. It was he who suggested that we should write a book about our escape and the mines?"

"Ah, how about that book? Didn't you get an offer from somebody?"

An eminent firm of publishers had made a demand, offering a magnificent price. Olga found the letter and read it. Then they were silent for a few minutes, wondering if the money could be earned, Zassoulitch swiftly thinking how the incidents of their history might be worked up to their credit; Olga's courage failing as she foresaw how much must be suppressed and garbled.

"It might be done," he said.

"I do not think I could do it."

"Oh, I could tell you what to say."

"It would be a fine thing to get that young fellow to help you," continued Zassoulitch, with a crafty smile.

"You'd hook the fish to a certainty. I know what that collaboration means."

Olga reddened, dropping her head.

"But the fellow seemed to me to be in care of his father and the father would stop the game before it was half finished. Besides, the invitation is only for an evening. We haven't time; and I don't like that right honorable gentleman—find another."

Olga set the letter aside, and took up another. "Major and Mrs. Caldecott," she began.

"Stop; that's the retired officer, isn't it?"

"Yes."

"He's written a book."

"Nearly everybody in England has," replied Olga, "or is going to. Major Caldecott is going to write about his collection of diamonds; but he told me he could not decide upon the title. 'How I got my Black Diamonds,' he thought might be taken for an advertisement of coals."

"His diamonds," said Zassoulitch, with unctuous softness. "I should like to feel them," opening and closing his hands slowly. "I heard that he had sunk all his fortune in those crystals. One of them cost £20,000: the finest in the world. Fancy sinking capital in a diamond that can bring no interest. It means that he pays more than two pounds every day for the pleasure of holding that diamond. He must be a fool. I should like to know him. He might write the book for us."

"No! no! no!" cried Olga, quickly terrified by the stealthy cunning in the old man's face.

"We were asked to stay at his house, I remember. Where is his letter?"

Olga turned to the papers with hopeful haste.

"When we return to Pangbourne, June 15th," she read, adding, in a tone of exultation, "three weeks hence."

"Curse the delay! We have only four days. Read some more."

Olga crushed the letter in her hand and slipped it in her pocket, as if putting away the evil. Then she turned quickly to the letters, and ran through many names that have no place now in this history. The invitations were all for evenings, or for periods later in the season when country houses begin to open for the receipt of visitors.

"All evenings," muttered Zassoulitch, impatiently. "Where are we to sleep during the day after the 28th?"

No answer to the question was forthcoming that night, and the next day, Mr. Phillips came and conducted them to The Princes' Hotel, where he had secured rooms for them with a lookout over the Embankment.

"My orders are," he said, in a low tone before leaving, "to square up everything on the 28th. I have told my friends, Mr. and Mrs. Maddix, to bring their inventory on that day; just a form, you know, to make sure, for the satisfaction of all parties, that everything is all right. And I have told them also, my lady," turning to Olga, "to bring the prince's original clothes and yours, miss. I've took the liberty," he added, with a backward glance, to see that the door was closed, "of having your shirts washed, and a patch put on the top of your Wellington, sir. Now—er—er," with some hesitation, as he again turned to Olga. "I thought that if I came here early in the morning—before the other visitors are, about you know—with a four-wheeler, and took you to the little hotel in White-chapel to do the change of articles, the prince would feel more comfortable-like in going out into the street afterwards."

Olga turned from the the window with sickening dismay, while Phillips, in perfect unconcern of everything but his own particular tact and delicacy, continued addressing Zassoulitch, who stood curling his magnificent mustache with well-sustained dignity under these trying conditions.

"You, see, prince, the season for sheepskin coats is over in London, and I thought you might look a little particular going down the Strand in your suit. The little blackguard boys do take such a lot of notice of these things."

CHAPTER.VI.

DESPAIR.

LONG after Phillips had withdrawn from the room, Zassoulitch sat in moody meditation, his back bending under the burden, his shoulders sinking with his courage, despair ageing his face, soul and body unconsciously falling back into the abject condition presented when he shuffled

into McAllister's office in Petticoat Lane to beg charity. He saw himself again a beggar, and felt the fall in advance.

But the shadow of coming events fell even blacker upon Olga. She had more to lose, her enjoyment of life being keener, its pleasures more extended; and the burden of misery heavier to bear, she being less inured to misfortune, her pride less crushed by shame. Her finer taste made the coarse ways of property more revolting. She had a vivid recollection of that sickening crowd in the Jews' quarter, when her grandfather, repeating the words of Phillips, had said, significantly, "This is where the poor live;" and as she had shrunk from the loathsome associates of Siberian Kameras, she now in spirit shrank from associating with that vile outpouring of Whitechapel slums.

At length, Zassoulitch, bracing himself up with sudden resolution, stretched out his hand and said, "Olga!"

"We are alone," she responded, without moving from the window.

"You must write to McAllister at once. There's no time to lose; we can't expect an answer to come in less than three days."

"What am I to say to him?"

"Tell him our position."

"He knows it."

Zassoulitch made an impatient gesture at this objection, and continued—

"Tell him that no invitation is available for three weeks, and ask him delicately—in a roundabout way, of course—to let us have money as a loan to pay our expenses until then."

"How are we to repay a loan?"

With a guttural exclamation of disgust he retorted, angrily, "That's not your affair."

"It *is* my affair if I am to write the letter."

"Do as I bid you. I don't choose to consider your opinions. Write!"

Olga stood for a moment irresolute; then, her pride getting the mastery, she shook her head and cried—

"No! It is too base. I am ashamed to think how much we have already taken from his hand by fraud."

"You'll have to humble yourself and lick the dust, little fool. Sooner or later you *must* beg; do you prefer to beg in rags?"

"Yes—if I must beg."

It was not all principle on Olga's part. Adversity was trying her temper as well as the old man's.

"Go to your room," said Zassoulitch, furiously; "and send Parker to me."

Olga left the room, and presently Parker took her place. Of course he could write, and Zassoulitch did not blush to dictate to him a piteous appeal to David McAllister, in which he made capital of Olga's pride in apologizing for writing through his servant. He was very well content with this effusion, and sent it off to the post at once. His resentment towards Olga was manifested in a frigid silence when they sat together at lunch, but it gave way of necessity when they went out for a drive in the afternoon, and he assumed his most amiable manner as he leaned back in the victoria, left at their disposal by Mrs. McAllister.

"We will get out in the park and walk," he said. "We may meet with something."

They got down in the Row, and walked slowly along under the elms on the lookout for an early invitation, Olga not without a sense of humiliation, for she realized that this was nothing but a kind of begging in disguise. They met many acquaintances, with whom they stopped to exchange civilities. The old man fished for invitations as boldly as he dared, telling how they were compelled to stay at The Princes' Hotel for two or three days, and complaining bitterly of English hotels, but they got no more than the most pressing invitations for odd evenings in the week following, with an earnest appeal not to forget that it was Thursday evening, or Friday afternoon, or Saturday at eight. They walked up and down until the old man's legs ached, and both would fain have sat down; but between them they had not enough to pay for chairs, ready money being one of the things Mr. Phillips had not felt bound to supply. Nevertheless, they persevered in that terribly urgent quest until Olga told him that scarcely any one was left in the park except nursemaids, and then they returned to the victoria and drove back to their hotel in rueful silence.

They were more lucky the next day. They met the Smythes—the Smythes, of Wimbledon. Olga would not have known them had they not introduced themselves, but her grandfather, who had a princely memory, recollected perfectly well the interesting discussion he had shared with Mrs. Smythe. Mrs. Smythe knew the horrors of

hotel life, and sympathizing with the prince in his delicate condition, begged them to come to Wimbledon on Saturday if they could put up with quite homely entertainment.

Zassoulitch, who could very well have put up with the entertainment of a common lodging house, was constrained to leave it open until the day after the following one, when he expected to learn from McAllister whether he and his family were returning to London immediately or not. It would be wrong to offer anything like a slight to such an esteemed friend. As a matter of fact, he did not know where the intervening days of Thursday and Friday were to be spent, and in addition to that, it had yet to be seen whether the clothes dealer and the Parkers would agree to an arrangement involving further payment, which they had good reason to know must be of a speculative kind.

It was something, however, to know that a house would be open to them at the end of the week, and Zassoulitch still buoyed himself up with the hope of a favorable reply to his appeal.

In the afternoon of the same day, Olga caught sight of Lesley Dunbar under the elms. As the victoria drew up to the walk he came to the side, raising his hat. Both he and Olga looked the brighter and the happier for this meeting. She liked him better than any man she had met. He was more at his ease, less formal and affected than most; dark—Olga preferred dark men—not too young, well built and good-looking, with an amiable mouth and eyes, and an expression almost feminine in its tenderness. One might have thought his character a weak one but for a certain indication of strength in his nose, with its finely cut and mobile nostrils. Perhaps there was strength, too, as well as weakness in his nature, as in most others.

"I have just left the Caldecotts. They are sitting under the trees there," he said, when the ordinary greetings were over.

"The dear major," exclaimed Zassoulitch, eagerly; "I must see him if possible. I want to tell him something that slipped my memory the other night about the emeralds found in the Urals."

"Oh, anything about precious stones, delights him," said Lesley, smiling. "May I take you to him?"

"Thank you," Zassoulitch answered, with his courtly

acceptance of favors, as he took the young man's arm and stepped down from the carriage. Parker stepped forward and took charge of his master while Lesley gave his hand to Olga.

"We have been talking about you—that is only natural," Lesley said. "Every one is eager to see you at Pangbourne; and for once Evelyn will be glad to get away from London."

"Evelyn?" Olga said, inquiringly.

"Miss Caldecott, I should have said. It is as natural to call her Evelyn as it is to call you princess." Olga acknowledged the compliment with an inclination of her head worthy of the title. "I regard her almost as a sister."

"Does that mean that she is a little less or a little more to you than other young ladies?" Olga asked.

"I don't know how to answer *that* question to you," he answered, pointedly.

They joined the Caldecotts, and Lesley, who had hurried off five minutes before to keep an engagement, sat down with the little group, forgetting everything in the magic of Olga's presence.

The Caldecotts were a family of the "jolly" type, emphatically English in appearance. Fair, large, smiling, happy people—father, mother, and daughter; their characteristics were brought out by contrast with Zassoulitch and Olga. The major, who had seen a good bit of fighting in Egypt, looked as little like a military man as Zassoulitch, who had never touched a sword in his life, looked like a civilian and might have been a well-to-do country gentleman, with a fad for model farming, perhaps. Zassoulitch looked like nothing in the world but a soldier. Mrs. Caldecott beamed with smiles, and could look grave only just as long as it took her to perceive that there was a cheerful side to a serious subject; it was a pleasure to hear her little fat laugh.

Evelyn was just such a daughter as such a well-mated pair should produce—a comely, healthy girl of twenty, or thereabouts, with blue eyes and brown hair, and a white nose, and the most cheerful, honest, candid, fearless expression that ever made even plain features lovable. She was not plain though, but as good-looking a girl as you would find at a country dance, and that is saying a good deal. But between her and Olga there was the difference

between white and black. The types were altogether different.

"I may be pretty, and my feet and hands are not too big for my limbs," she had said, in her loud, outspoken way, when her mother was making comparisons with a favorable view of her own. "But the princess *is* a princess, and she's simply beautiful; and as for her hand, I never take it without wanting to kiss it."

The major had been thinking about that Siberian book, and saw his way clearly to the beginning. He would put aside his work on black diamonds for the present, as it was important that the other book should be produced without delay; the only possible difficulty he foresaw was the question of opening with a preface. The major's literary achievements were invariably balked at the outset by obstacles of this kind.

"Are you fond of rowing?" asked Evelyn of Olga, as her father and Zassoulitch turned the subject of conversation to Siberian emeralds.

"I prefer being rowed," Olga replied.

"So much the better; Lesley and I will do the work, and as I row stroke we shall be able to chat all the while. Lesley, you know, has his bachelor quarters at Pangbourne—such a jolly little box, almost opposite us. We can see his windows from the lawn, and we've a code of signals which we telegraph with our tennis bats; it's such fun. Do you like lawn tennis?"

"Of course, there is no doubt about your coming on the 28th?" asked Mrs. Caldecott, when the gossip was ended and they were parting company.

"There can be no doubt in such a case," replied Zassoulitch, with a profound bow.

"If McAllister only answers the letter in time," he murmured, prayerfully, as their carriage moved on, thinking of the major's diamonds and the careless, go-as-you-please character of the family. The wish found an echo in Olga's heart, as she half turned to give a last bow to Lesley Dunbar.

David McAllister's reply did come in time. It was among the letters brought to them in their private sitting-room the next morning.

"Here is one with a Scotch post-mark," Olga said.

"That's it—that's it," said Zassoulitch, rubbing his hands in feverish excitement. "Read it."

Olga read:—

"SIR,—Will you kindly telegraph the address of Princess Radozski and of your late bankers in Moscow at once? I am informed, on credible authority, that a convicted thief named Isaakoff has also escaped from Siberia and is personating Prince Zassoulitch. Although I have, personally, no doubt whatever with regard to your identity, you will, I am sure, see the necessity under which I find myself of obtaining an assurance that I am in treaty with the real Prince Zassoulitch before making the pecuniary advance you honor me by demanding. By means of the telegraph we shall be able to settle the affair satisfactorily to all parties in a few hours.

"I am, sir,

"Your obedient servant,

"DAVID McALLISTER."

Olga's faltering voice could scarcely struggle through the last lines. As she came to the end the letter dropped from her shaking fingers, and she covered her face with her hands, as if all the world were witness to her shame.

"That cursed Zimmerman!" ejaculated Zassoulitch, bitterly; then, turning fiercely towards Olga, like a trapped fox snapping at the air: "Why didn't you write to him? Why didn't you remind me of my promise to pay him if we succeeded? He's heard of our success, and taking silence for a sign of treachery, has retaliated with this. May his bones rot!"

Olga made no reply. Zassoulitch, when the paroxysm of rage was past, rose and slowly walked up and down the room, feeling his way with outstretched hands, his spirit at the same time groping in the dark for points of guidance.

After awhile, coming back to his chair, he sank down in it with a groan of exhaustion. It was useless to search: nothing was to be found.

He had no bankers in Moscow; no friends of any credit or position. His knowledge of the contents of those letters purloined from the Princess Radozski (and since then returned) assured him of her neutrality, but of nothing more. She would not willingly make him an enemy, but he knew that no threat would induce her to commit a fraud. No; nothing was to be done. As for telegraphing to McAllister—well, it was some excuse for silence in this

direction that they had not the means to pay for a telegram.

They sat there in silence hour after hour without the wish to go out. What was the good of seeking invitations now, of associating with pleasant people? In twenty-four hours they would be ragged outcasts in Whitechapel, stripped of their finery, dressed in a strange garb for boys to jeer at, and without one friend in the world.

At night when Zassoulitch went to his room for the night—bent, feeble, spiritless, the very picture of despondency—Parker led him to a chair, and, having carefully closed the door, returned with his obsequious air, preserved even in the presence of the blind man, and said—

“Will the prince take a little spirit before undressing?”

He had learnt at the Embassy to address his master in the third person.

“Yes, a good deal, and strong,” answered Zassoulitch.

Parker mixed the grog, and put it in his master's hand. Zassoulitch drank deeply. Parker took the glass from his hand, and replaced it with a cigarette, applying a light when the old man was ready for it. Zassoulitch, leaning back in the yielding cushions of the saddle back, exhaled the smoke with a deep sigh, realizing at the last moment the delights of luxury and attention.

“May I ask if the prince will require my services after to-night?” asked Parker.

Zassoulitch shook his head gloomily.

“Mr. Smythe's servant said the prince was going there on Saturday; that is why I asked.”

Again Zassoulitch shook his head in mournful silence.

“Perhaps when the prince goes into Berkshire to visit Major Caldecott?”

Another melancholy shake of the head upon the pillow was the response.

“My wife is so attached to the princess, and my own position is so exactly what I wanted, that if by any means—by *any means*,” he repeated, with peculiar emphasis, “we could keep on the engagement——”

Zassoulitch, in the act of raising the cigarette to his lips suddenly arrested his hand, the lids of his sightless eyes rose on the clouded balls, he ceased to breathe for a moment, then, starting into an upright position as an idea struck him, he said—

“Parker, have you got money?”

"A little, prince."

"I have none."

"I am aware of that, prince."

"Then how do you suppose I am to pay you for your continued service?"

"I did not suppose anything of the kind. But it struck us—my wife and me—that if we accompanied you to that house in Berkshire—Major Caldecott's—" he turned round to make sure the doors were fast, and, bending over Zassoulitch, continued almost in a whisper, "*we might pay ourselves!*"

CHAPTER VII

THE NEXT STEP.

WHEN Olga woke in the morning from the nightmare that had haunted her the night through, and looked at her watch, she found it was past nine.

"Does the princess wish that I should ring for tea?" asked Mrs. Parker; she was to the full as punctilious as her husband, approaching the bedside as her mistress moved.

"No; we are going away this morning. You were to have called me at seven. Is Mr. Phillips waiting?"

Mrs. Parker replied categorically. Mr. Phillips had been and gone, leaving his respectful compliments to the princess. She had not woke the princess at seven as she seemed then to be sleeping so soundly; and she understood that the prince had made arrangements to stay at the hotel until Saturday.

"Where is my grandfather?" asked Olga, preplexed to the last degree by this unexpected turn of events.

"The prince is in his room. He wishes to be undisturbed till Parker returns. My husband has gone with Mr. Phillips to arrange some affairs on behalf of the prince with a Mr. and Mrs. Madox."

Olga dared ask no more, and Mrs. Parker's lips remained firmly closed as if under a seal. At eleven o'clock, Zassoulitch entered the sitting-room where Olga waited in restless impatience to know her fate. There was not a

trace of last night's dejection in the old man's face when Parker led him in. He was absolutely gay as he saluted Olga. As the door closed, and Olga's hand told him they were alone, he clapped his palm and said—

"My dear child, it's all right. That for McAllister, that for Phillips, that for Madox, and the whole tribe, and he gave three sounding snaps with his right finger and thumb.

"Who has done this for us?" asked Olga.

"Parker," speaking low.

"On what conditions?" she asked, with quick suspicion, seeking the truth in that face, sometimes so benign, sometimes so crafty in its expression, always so terrible in its insincerity. The tone of apprehension in her voice came just in time to put the old man on his guard. His satisfaction might have led him to say too much. He also was uncertain how far she was to be trusted; for though she had yielded under the pressure of circumstances, she had rebelled fiercely more than once against his guidance. She was capable of ruining him as well as herself upon some paltry question of principle. Without remorse he would have abandoned her to rot in a ditch; but he could not do without her; and so against his stubborn pride he had to humor her and manage her caprices.

"Oh," he answered, easily, "on condition that we repay them when we can. They know perfectly well that we shall not stay in our present condition longer than we can help. And when we have made our fortunes, as we must make them, the price of their secrecy is the payment of their bill. It's simple enough."

"We enter into a kind of partnership with them," she said, drawing herself up.

"Something like that," he replied, with a careless movement of his hands.

"Partners with our servants," she said.

Again, he made an outward sweep with his hands, as if throwing away care.

"It is humiliating," said Olga, with a fall in her voice as she sank in a chair.

The old man ceased to smile, and turned towards her with an angry stamp of his foot. If he had told her the whole truth, that the Parkers were henceforth to be their masters, and they but servants, paid to play a part which would serve their dishonest ends, Olga might have prated

about their humiliation ; but to whine at her lot as he represented it was unendurable.

"Do as you please, fool," he said, fiercely. "Go to the gutter if you find less degradation there. The choice is open to you ; do you refuse ?"

"No, I accept," Olga answered, in a tone of shame.

"Ah, to be sure you will," he retorted, with a sneer.

"You haven't the courage to sink, nor the boldness to rise. What have you to do with the question of humiliation ; you have no pride !"

"No pride ? I think I have too much for one in my state."

"The pride of a petty shopkeeper, who aims to be respectable, and only cheats within the limits of the law in marking his goods 'first quality' when he knows they're not. The pride of the honest man, who never robbed in his life, but sneaks out of paying here, takes advantage of another's oversight there, and pilfers where he can with safety. If you had pride you'd rise like an eagle to strike, not creep like rats and vermin on your prey."

"You speak as if fraud were a necessity."

"And so it is, to all who would succeed ; success is in proportion to the fraud. The clever thief is honored ; the burglar sent to prison. One is made a judge to pass sentence on the other. The blameless man is a cunning hypocrite ; the unmasked villain is a fool. All has something to conceal. Not one dare tell all that he knows about his own self. One may know that without much wisdom. The book of human nature is open for all to study, and its lesson is this : trust none, we differ in degree, but not in kind. In all the world there is not one honest man."

The old man was content with himself, as most orators are who have it all their own way in an argument, and, not to spoil a good thing by overdoing it, said no more upon the subject. His teaching was not without effect upon Olga. She could not oppose her sentiments to his reasoning, and, indeed, despite her repugnance to his doctrine, she felt that there must be some truth in it. It seemed to her that, in this game of life, those must lose who did not conceal their hands ; and, limited as her experience was, she saw that nearly every one was, more or less, untrue to himself—each one disguising his true character in some way, and assuming (in the simple mat-

ter of dress and outward appearances, for example) a state other than his own. And, in assuming a condition to which they were not entitled, were they offending more than those who made a like practice in a minor degree—the servants who strut out on Sundays with the airs of their masters? Ignoring that their new position entailed anything more than this, she discharged her scruples with a sigh, drove through the park in the afternoons as usual, and on Saturday descended, all smiles, upon the Smythes, of Wimbledon,

Nothing in the behavior of Parker or Mrs. Parker intimated in the slightest degree the change of circumstances. There was an eternal fixity in Mrs. Parker's countenance which it seemed no condition could alter. Olga's only apprehension was caused by that letter from McAllister. One day she spoke on the subject to her grandfather.

"You may be sure I have overlooked nothing," he replied. "There's only one way in which a prince could reply to such a letter as that, and a dignified silence is all he will get out of me. There's nothing whatever to fear. It will do him no good, but a great deal of harm, to publish what that rascal Zimmerman (curse his generation!) has told him; and he's far too clever for that. Society would hold him responsible for introducing us. Even if he wished to injure us—and he has no reason to hate us—it would take him months to bring evidence confirming Zimmerman's statements. And what then? If they brought the real Zassoulitch himself from Kara to confront us, we should simply have to say that he was an impostor backed up by the Russian Government, and not we the impostors. These English will believe anything you like to say against the Russian Government, and I believe it would be an absolute advantage to have the Russian Embassy and all the congregation of the Greek Church against us. Party feeling would be roused, and we might expect public subscription on our behalf. Why, these people will absolutely go mad in the defence of a murderer convicted by a judge and jury. What more can we wish for?"

Certainly the treatment they received at present left nothing to be desired. Their stay at Wimbledon was made agreeable by every means that consideration and a lavish expenditure of money could provide, and, when they left to go to the Caldecotts, Mrs. Smythe shed tears,

so great was the affection she felt for Olga, so great her sympathy and respect for the prince, and such social distinction had their visit procured. It had been a success all through. The Parkers had spared them. The only act that brought those admirable servants into notice was one which left a pleasant memory. One morning, after a card party, Parker presented Mr. Smythe with a sovereign, which he said he had picked up on the floor. Of course, for his honesty, he was told to keep it; so he put the piece back in the pocket he had taken it from, getting at any rate, a good character for his pains.

Their reception at Pangbourne was marked by no display of special preparation or servile attention. The Caldecotts were accustomed to good living and good society. Any one invited to their house received a hearty welcome and the best they had to give. They could offer their visitors no more, and they did not attempt to. The frank, unconstrained, easy-going manners of this family were a delightful change to Olga from the restless anxiety to give satisfaction, which made familiarity with the people at Onslow Square and Wimbledon impossible. She seemed to breathe a new air, pure and wholesome as the breeze that came down from the beech woods: it was good.

There were no other visitors in the house when they arrived. Lesley Dunbar dropped in after lunch, and the major, having changed his morning suit for flannels and a blazer, they went down to the tennis lawn. As Olga could not play, Mrs. Caldecott took a racquet to make up the set, playing with Lesley against Evelyn and her father. Olga looked on in amazement, the physical exertion of Evelyn astonishing her not less than the agility of the portly Mrs. Caldecott, and the vivacity of the burly major; and she liked all of them the better because, to her foreign eyes, they appeared a little bit ridiculous playing like quite young children.

"Oh, my side!" exclaimed the major, sticking his knuckles under his ribs after a severe set, as he came across the lawn to where Olga sat. "Will you take a ball or two, Miss Zassoulitch?"

"Oh, no—no—no!" she replied. "I must wait till I am acclimatized."

"I should have thought you capable of anything after Siberia," said Lesley.

"My sufferings up to now," she replied, turning upon

him with a flash of wit in her eyes, "have been passive."

She watched Evelyn and Lesley closely with feminine interest in the attachment she had believed to exist between them.

"Thank you, Les," called Evelyn in her full contralto, indicating the balls she wanted as she pushed back the hair from her moist brow. Instead of bringing the balls to her hand with a compliment, he sent them to her feet with a sweep of his bat, continuing his conversation with the major.

Olga could not imagine young people—even though they were English—loving in this cavalier fashion; and watching them still, from day to day, she became convinced that, though a man could entertain a strong affection for a woman with whom he was on such terms of familiar equality, he could never love her passionately. No, the grand passion was impossible with lawn tennis. Perhaps that is why she never tried to play the game seriously.

As she became better acquainted with the Caldecotts she liked them more; their undisguised defects, their unpretentious virtues, endeared them to her, and restored her shaken belief in human honesty, setting up again the lovable god of Truth which her grandfather had overthrown. Here was a living refutation of his sweeping cynical generalities. All men were not alike base. Here were three who had no secret to conceal.

CHAPTER VIII.

AT PANGBOURNE.

ONE extreme produced another. From believing that all must conceal their hands, Olga flew to the conclusion that Evelyn must show all her cards. She said to herself that a girl so fearless and outspoken could not love Lesley Dunbar without letting it be known. And there was no motive for concealment. She was not aware that we would rather not have it known that we have any feeling

at all, and that an English girl makes a secret of being in love almost as if it were a shameful thing.

One day Olga said, with a view to confirming her belief, "I want to ask you something. Do English girls ever fall in love?"

Evelyn rested on her oars—she was paddling her friend among the backwaters—looked at her in amazement for a few moments, and then, reddening to her temples, replied—

"Rather!" with a strong emphasis on the first syllable.

"When you say you are rather angry you mean not very much. Does it apply to love in the same way?"

"Oh, no! It's not at all the same thing. Rather is slang. I should have said 'very much'—oh, some girls are awfully spoony?"

"Spoon-ie—what is that—spoonie?"

"Why, you know when a man makes a dreadful donkey of himself, we call him a spoon; and when he talks a lot of nonsense to you, he is spooning; and when they both behave like a pair of stupid, then they're spoony." She was silent a moment, and then, as the vision of two lovers walking as if moonstruck side by side, with not a word to say to each other, came before her imagination, tickling her sense of humor, she laughed, blushes twinkling all over her face, and added, in a tone of expostulation, "Oh! It is frightfully silly when you come to think of it, isn't it?"

"No; I do not think so," answered Olga, to whose mind the idea of love brought no ridiculous image. "Love to me, though I have not loved, appears very beautiful and very terrible; like the waves of the sea, that nothing can stay—like the lightning out of the sky!"

"I daresay it does," said Evelyn, gravely, suddenly awed by Olga's earnestness. "It is so different with you. Your books are all tragic; your love never brings happiness. I suppose we are not so much in earnest. I wonder why that is?" She raised her eyebrows, and looked reflectively in the water, resting on her oars. Olga waited, silent, for the result of her meditations, and presently she continued, "I suppose it's because we in England have so much freedom. You out of it are so restricted before marriage."

"What difference does that make? Our hearts beat just the same."

"Yes ; but you see we can get all our flirting done before marriage. And then if difficulties arise, the consequences are not so terrible. If we can't agree, we change our affections. We can separate and be happy, but you can't do that if you're married, and then the trouble comes."

"Do you flirt?" asked Olga, point-blank, encouraged by the candor in Evelyn's face.

"Oh, we all do. We pretend we don't, but we *do*!"

"Not when you are engaged?"

Evelyn was silent a moment, and then she laughed, her sense of humor again stirred by the memory of her own delinquencies in spite of her belief that she should one day marry Lesley.

"I think we're rather worse when we're engaged than when we're not; the temptation to be mischievous is so delightfully irresistible."

"And that does not lead to serious consequences?" Olga asked.

"We have dreadful quarrels—I speak in a general sense, you know, because I am not really engaged—but the reconciliation after is so delicious that it's quite worth a little rupture to get it."

"But suppose there is no reconciliation?" Olga persisted.

"Oh! then there's a good deal of crying. And we mope and look miserable, and papa has to take us down South for three or four months. And we generally come back desperately in love with somebody else."

"Nothing worse than that?" Olga asked, smiling.

"Not in ordinary cases. We never throw vitriol in each other's faces, or shoot ourselves, or go on in that way—not people in our class of society."

Olga's conscience was appeased. Surely Evelyn could not speak in this strain were she deeply in love with Lesley. The fact that they were not engaged showed that their feeling did not amount to a passion.

At that moment he who was in the thoughts of both—Lesley—came plunging down the steep side of the wooded hill.

"Mind the quarry, Les!" Evelyn cried, recognizing his gray suit through the underwood.

He came over the gravel cutting with a six-foot drop, and stood panting on the bank, hat in hand, radiant as Apollo.

"Why, however did you find us!" asked Evelyn, her eyes aglow with admiration of his handsome figure and manly vigor.

"Thine eyes are loadstars, and thy tongue sweet air," he said, smiling. "I heard your laugh on the top of the hill. It's as good as a foghorn."

Olga said to herself that a man might say such a thing to a sister; but to a girl he loved, never.

"Oh, I know I've got a voice like a man's," Evelyn retorted, laughing at her own expense. She liked Lesley's chaff, knowing how tenderly considerate he could be in season. "Where did you find those wild flowers?"

"On the top of the hill; the whole place is white with them, where it's not blue with hyacinths. May I?" he asked bending forward and throwing the little bouquet of wild flowers at Olga's feet.

She took them up, giving him that long lingering smile which invariably upset the coolest man's equanimity.

"Oh, I must have some for the dinner table; the gardeners won't let us take any more flowers from the houses," said Evelyn.

"The hill is too steep for Miss Zassoulitch just here, but there's a practicable path about a hundred yards further on."

After a brief discussion the boat was drawn in; and Evelyn steadied it with a scull while Lesley helped Olga to land. The cold winds of the late spring had suddenly given place to the warmth of summer, and Olga wore for the first time a black lace dress with net sleeves, through which her beautiful rounded arms looked like marble. Her close fitting bodice, cut low in the throat, pronounced the feminine grace of her figure. A large lace hat made a dark setting to her white face. Evelyn, in a rigid straw hat and boating costume—her most becoming dress in Lesley's eyes hitherto—looked almost masculine by her side, and her movements by comparison ungainly.

When they reached the narrow path, Evelyn, eager to get the anemones, went on first.

"Will you leave me here till you have taken Miss Caldecott up?" Olga asked.

"Oh," he replied, with a laugh, "she would not accept my help if I offered it. She's too proud of her independence for that."

"It is strange to be proud of that."

"Do you think so?"

"Yes. Because it is a great pleasure to accept assistance." She laid her hand upon his offered arm.

"Not greater pleasure than it is to give it," Lesley answered, fervently.

"That is more than a compliment; it is a truth. Oh! the strong and the weak should be friends, for one must have something to worship and the other to cherish. I would not be independent to lose so much, and gain so little."

"I am glad of it—especially at this moment," he added retaining her hand, which he had taken to help her cross a rough part of the path.

The contact of their hands thrilled him through, the perfume from her glove rose to his brain like the fume of a narcotic, the glance of her soft, dark eyes went to his very soul; his pulse throbbed with an ecstasy he had never known till now, and in that instant a mad desire to retain her hand, to go further, seized him. Then an exclamation from above, as Evelyn caught sight of the anemones, brought him back to his senses; he relinquished her hand and they went on in perfect silence, Lesley embarrassed by the demand upon his self-restraint, Olga occupied in speculation upon the significance of that momentary but unmistakable demonstration.

There was no occasion to offer his arm again—the path was less difficult, and Olga had to take up her skirt—so he folded his hands resolutely behind him, but the desire to linger on the way, to take her hand again, to look into her eyes for some encouraging light in their depths, was felt none the less because it had to be suppressed. Even the silent embarrassment added a piquant charm to the situation.

"This man will ask me to be his wife if I give him the opportunity," Olga said to herself; "and why shouldn't I? Evelyn's feeling for him can be nothing more than friendship—fellowship—affection, at the most. If she loved him, would not her eyes detect what is clear in mine? If she loved him, could she wish to be independent—would she abandon him to me?"

Meanwhile poor Evelyn was bending down among the anemones, hurriedly gathering the flowers she distinguished through the gathering mist in her eyes, with a

grievous pain in her heart. She was only too conscious of her own shortcomings. That allusion to her laugh—uttered carelessly, without an unkind thought, she knew—rankled in her memory. She knew she was boisterous and that her laugh was loud; she almost feared that her manner was wanting in delicate tone. She knew that she compared unfavorably with Olga, and that, by no effort, could she ever hope to be so fascinating. And she knew now that Lesley only loved her as he would have loved a sister had he had one and not as a man loves a girl whom he desires to make his wife. She knew that he was lingering down there to be alone with Olga. "And he wishes me twenty miles away," she said to herself, with a furtive glance behind, to see that they were not yet in sight, and then a quick search for her handkerchief, to brush away the gathered tear. "Oh, I am not blind," she continued, choking down a little sob, "she loves him and he loves her and I shall never—never—be his wife."

Another observer had marked the tendency of Lesley's affection to estrangement. The Right Hon. Charles Dexter Dunbar usually ran down at the end of the week and spent a couple of days with his son, and very little escaped his observation wherever he went.

"A very fascinating young woman, Miss Olga Zassoulitch," he said to his son one evening when they were returning from the Caldecotts.

"Isn't she, sir?" Lesley replied, eagerly responsive.

"Charming in every way."

"Her romantic story adds so greatly to one's interest," Lesley suggested.

"Without that her position would not be the brilliant one it is. Bubbles are brilliant, too; they invariably burst, and their end is, more or less, an unpleasant mess."

"I don't quite see the connection, sir."

"I was thinking of the Zassoulitch reputation, and of something I heard from the Russian Ambassador on Wednesday. He has telegraphed to St. Petersburg, and been told in reply that Prince Zassoulitch and his daughter are still in safe keeping at Kara."

"Oh, the Russian Government would naturally say anything to damp public sympathy with escaped political exiles."

"It is possible. On the other hand, David McAllister

frankly told me that he knew nothing about these people except that they came with a letter of recommendation from a business correspondent in Hamburg. We may learn the truth some day. Meanwhile, our attitude should be one of prudent reserve. They profess to be ruined. That may be only a *façon de parler*. Do you know anything certainly about their pecuniary position?"

"Less than I know of my own," said Lesley, pointedly.

"There is no reason why you should not know your position clearly. It is best you should. When you marry, or choose to take the management of your own fortune—to-morrow, if you will—you will have ten thousand pounds. That is as much as I can afford to give you at present. It is not a large fortune, but, if you marry well, it may serve until our party comes in again. Caldecott says he shall give Evelyn £20,000, or the equivalent, when she marries."

Lesley found this turn of conversation in some way repugnant to his feelings, and said nothing.

"It would be very unwise," the Right Hon. continued, in his measured tones,—after walking a dozen yards in silence, "to jeopardize the chance of getting such a wife as Evelyn will make with a fortune of £20,000."

"How do you mean, sir?"

"I mean it would be highly imprudent to entangle yourself in a *liaison* with Miss Zassoulitch."

"Miss Zassoulitch!" Lesley exclaimed, "why, I am virtually engaged to Evelyn."

"That is why I pointed out that it would be unwise to yield to the fascination of Miss Zassoulitch," said the sententious ex-minister, with a dry cough.

CHAPTER IX.

FACING THE TRUTH.

WITH a hammock chair in one hand and a magazine in the other Lesley strolled out from his breakfast room to enjoy a quiet pipe. It was the morning after his talk with the Right Honorable, and his eyes in glancing across the

river fell on the great cedar on the Caldecotts' lawn. He stopped short, and puffing slowly at his pipe, asked himself seriously if there was anything in what his father had said. Had he gone too far with Olga Zassoulitch? Of course he had been attracted by her. He admired her very much. Everybody did; and perhaps he had been particular in his attentions, and, well, there was no good in blinking the fact; she had fetched him considerably. But he had been fetched before by a dozen—a score of pretty girls. It was nonsense to suppose that either he or Evelyn was so desperately in love with each other that they could not think of any one else; that was the sort of thing that could only exist in a novel, and a very poor one, too, an exclusive devotion as absurd in theory as it was in fact. The question was, had he gone such lengths as to affect his relations with Evelyn, or even to give her real cause of complaint? Because, if he had gone so far, he certainly ought to pull up sharp. Not for the reasons suggested by his father. "Thank God," he parenthesized, "I've never thought of what I should get by marrying her besides a jolly good wife;" but because Evelyn was the last person in the world upon whom he would inflict pain if he could help it—jolly old girl! No, upon impartial consideration, setting down the hammock chair, and bumping himself into it with an easy conscience and the satisfaction that springs from the knowledge of that possession, he might conclude that he had not gone too far. Because Evelyn was always sharp enough to discover his small flirtations, and fearless enough to let him know what she thought of him when her opinion was deprecatory, and as she had never said a word about Olga, it was clear she acquitted him of any misbehavior. Still, for her sake, he would be on his guard, and, in truth, one needed all one's self-possession under the dark eyes of that lovely little Russian, who—

Just at that moment a flash of white on the Caldecotts' lawn broke off his reflections, and he started to his feet with an eagerness not stimulated by the hope of seeing Evelyn, for when he discovered it was she, he turned to the railing by his side, and gravely knocked the ashes out of his pipe.

A wave of repentance surged over him, and as he looked again across the river, his face lit up with warm affection. He signalled to Evelyn with the magazine; then

ran down to the water's edge, stepped into his dingy, and pulled across the stream.

She smiled a welcome upon him as he pulled into the shore, having come down the lawn with the hope that he would see her.

"What are you going to do, Eve, to-day?" he asked.

"No engagements," she replied, with a shrug and a cheerful shake of the hand.

"Will you go fishing with me—lovely morning for the water?"

"Lovely. I should like it; you know that." Then, with a little hesitation in her voice, she asked, "shall I fetch Olga?"

"Is it necessary?" he asked, after a pause, as he tilted his hat to shield his eyes from the sun.

"Papa said he certainly would begin the book this morning; he asked her quite earnestly last night to meet him in the library at eleven. But,"—after a little struggle with her conscience—"he has said that every night—and is——"

"Oh no! We'll leave her out. Can't talk and fish too. Let them know you're going down stream with me, and I'll pull over for the rods."

She nodded and he pushed off.

"Oh, Les," she called, after going a step towards the house, "shall I come in this dress?"

Lesley shifted his position to examine her. He had not remarked what sort of dress she wore. Yet she had put it on for the first time that morning, in the hope that he would like her in it, having had it made expressly to fit close to her figure, and laced her corsets to accommodate her figure to the dress.

"Oh, heavens, you can't pull in that thing!" he exclaimed, seeing nothing but its unfitness for the occasion. "Slip on your old boating dress: that's the only wear."

It was a little bit disheartening, especially as she had overcome her pride and many stubborn resolutions to wear a dress like Olga's, with the tacit self-admission that it was worn to win his approval.

"Never mind," she said to herself. "It serves me right for putting on this hateful thing, and trying to look smaller than I am. If he doesn't like me as Nature has made me he can never like me at all."

Her spirits revived when she had taken off the new dress and slipped on her flannels.

"Oh! that's ever so much better," she said, looking at herself in the glass; "I do look *English*, anyhow."

As she went down through the garden she plucked a flower for her dress, excusing Lesley in advance for overlooking her feminine requirements in the preoccupation of getting the lines together. She carried it in her hand, though, out of sight, in case, despite all, he had recollected his old practice of bringing her a flower. And he had thought of it, bless his kind heart! He was waiting for her at the water's edge, trimming the thorns from the stem of a rose.

They pulled up towards Stratly on the lookout for likely places, and selected a corner where they had fished a hundred times before. It was not a good place for fish from an angler's point of view, but for that reason they were more likely to have it to themselves and not be bothered by the proximity of other fishers. There was a pleasant view of golden meadows opposite, the trees afforded shade from the sun, and one could throw a line without getting it mixed up with the boughs overhead. Evelyn knew every tuft of bending sedge and every willow around them, and loved them for the sake of the dear memories they revived, and it was perfect happiness to sit there and dream, watching her float as it went peacefully down with the current, with the consciousness that Lesley was sitting quite close to her, and inhaling with gladness an occasional whiff of smoke from his pipe. There was not much sport, but that didn't matter. Over and over again they had been told that they must bait overnight and get up at daybreak; and fish with worms or gentles, or some other horrid, wriggling thing. But they preferred to come down in this way, and bait with pellets of bread crumbs and fish in this way, even if they caught nothing.

When they had been "fishing" for about an hour, Evelyn purposely threw her line at the wrong moment and got it entangled with Lesley's, just to see if he would be as patient with her as ever.

"I knew you would!" he said, with a touch of vexation in his voice. You always do. Just as I'm going to get a bite."

He held up the tangled lines ruefully; their eyes met,

and they burst into a laugh at their own expense. Turning round on the thwarts face to face, they set to work to unravel the knots, helping each other, hindering each other, wasting an hour without a moment's regret—with positive delight to Evelyn.

"I suppose it's time to think of going home to lunch," she said, with a sigh, when their lines were at length separated.

"Lunch! But we've caught nothing yet!" Lesley said, with vehemence.

"We never do," she replied, with a smile; "except that day when we caught three. Don't you remember?"

"I should think I did!"

Then they fell into a chatting reminiscence of bygone expeditions they had made together since the day when Lesley, having half a crown given him on his twelfth birthday, bought two rods and lines complete and sixpennyworth of hardbake, and he took Evelyn, then about eight, to fish for "real big 'uns."

"What glorious days we've spent on this beautiful old river, you and I?" Lesley said, in conclusion.

Evelyn could hardly reply for the emotion that choked her as she thought of all this happiness gone by now.

Lesley would not hear of going home to lunch—that was quite against ancient usage. When it was known that they had gone fishing, nobody would expect them at lunch and the cook would understand that she would have to put dinner back half an hour. But being hungry, they struck fishing for the morning and pulled up to Stratly in good style, and there they went to an excellent inn, where one can get a famous beefsteak pie and capital brown ale, if nothing else. After lunch they returned to the river and found another familiar nook, where they tied the boat up to the willows and lingered in delectable idleness till the shadows grew long. They parted at the foot of the lawn, and Evelyn, though she could not tear herself away from the water's edge until Lesley landed and waved his hand from the other side, was glad he had declined to come over in the evening; she wanted to store this day's happiness in her memory, to be recalled without one regretful pang. For despite her tender joy, her still cherished hope, a vague presentiment filled her mind, which might have been translated into such words as these :—

"I shall see Lesley no more as I have seen him to-day. This is our farewell to the past. Never again shall we idle away a summer's day together."

CHAPTER X.

A LOST LOVE.

"Oh it's all right," said Lesley to himself, with cheerful self-satisfaction, as he carried the rods up from the boat. "I'm not such a weak-kneed ass that I can't go over a rough bit of road without stumbling. Evelyn's the wife for me—a dear chum, a loyal affection, honest"—there was a mental pause, the occasion calling for an endearing diminutive, and then he added, as a diminutive seemed out of place applied to a girl of Evelyn's proportions—"brick of a girl!"

Confident in his own strength, he accepted without reluctance an invitation to dine with the Caldecotts the next evening.

The wind had changed in the night, and in the morning the rain came down with a steady persistence that allowed no hope of a break for the next twelve hours. About mid-day the major received a telegram from Lord George Betterton at Marlowe, running thus: "A boating party of ladies and gentlemen coming down from Oxford, we find ourselves weatherbound in this detestable hole, with no distraction but a local paper of the week before last. We are seven. What shall we do?"

The genial major's reply was prompt—"Come on here by next train, and wait for better days."

At the same time he sent a telegram to Bond Street requesting that a quadrille quartette should be sent down; and then dispatched a dozen notes of invitation to friends in the neighborhood, calling upon them to assist at an informal dance in the evening. The boating party arrived in the afternoon. All were more or less well known by the Caldecotts; and after an excellent dinner, at which the host's jovial hospitality put every one at ease, followed by coffee and cigarettes in the library, the party

adjourned to the long drawing-room, which had been cleared for the dance, and where the quartette were already tuning their instruments.

"Which will he dance with first?" That question had been uppermost in Evelyn's mind since the question of dancing had been settled in the morning. It was also present in Olga's thoughts as Lesley strolled in from the library, and her eyes shone upon him kindly. Not only she liked him better than any Englishman she had ever met, but she recognized, by his supple figure and easy grace, that he was the best dancer in the room. He was not unconscious of her soft glance. It made his pulse beat quicker, but he was still firm in his allegiance to Evelyn—at least in its outward form—and after a few words in passing, he left Olga to her little circle of admirers, and joined Evelyn, at that moment crossing the room alone.

"You haven't engaged yourself to anybody for the first dance?" he asked.

"Of course I have not," she answered with a warm smile.

Then he gave her his arm, and they walked up and down the room, chatting with an unwonted restraint, for both were thinking about Olga and trying to disguise their thoughts. It was a relief when the waltz began and they could be silent.

Evelyn danced well, and in that dance heart and feet were one in a yearning desire to be lighter, lighter, lighter! She had never danced so well before, but Lesley did not notice that. What he remarked was the wonderful facility with which Olga accommodated herself to our English step, the perfect grace of her movements, and her lingering smile as they passed.

He sought her eagerly when he left Evelyn after that waltz.

"I fear there is no chance of taking you out for the next dance," he said, as she turned from Betterton to meet him.

"I have accepted no partner," she answered. "I waited—"

"For me?"

"For the best dancer," she replied, laying her hand lightly on his offered arm.

Her dancing was a revelation to Lesley of a delight un-

known till then. Her yielding waist and clinging hand, the perfume of her hair, the flash of her eyes, communicated to him something of the self-abandonment to voluptuous ecstasy to which she yielded under the sensuous influence of music and motion. Evelyn passed unseen. He saw nothing but the beautiful face against his shoulder. Before they separated he had exacted a ready promise for every fourth dance of the evening.

When he did not dance with Olga he chose for partners the plainest girls in the room or Evelyn. And Evelyn, observing this, perceived the truth, and said to herself, bitterly, "He dances with me, not because it gives him pleasure, but because he thinks it pleases me."

Her step was no longer light after that. She had no heart to dance, and when he came again and asked for her hand, she pleaded fatigue, and declined.

Then she escaped from the room, knowing by the quick glance he shot across at a group close by that he would take advantage of his release to get another dance with Olga. She did not wish to see them dance again. It made her feel wicked, not with hatred of her rival—she was too generous for that—but with jealous envy and self-disgust.

The library windows were open to admit the air; the clouds had broken up. Now and then the moon passed the silver edging of the great cumuli and traversed a space of deepest blue. It was soft and still on the terrace. She strolled along till she came to a column supporting the portico, and then, leaning upon the rail secure from observation, she pressed her burning cheek against the cold stone, and looked up at the tranquil moon with agony in her heart.

"What a glorious night!" exclaimed Lesley in a low tone of delight, as he led his partner, after the dance, to the conservatory at the end of the room. "Look at the moon! I should think the nightingales are serenading her."

"The nightingales! What is that?" asked Olga.

"I don't know the Russian for it, but it's a lovely little songster, at his best on such a night at this. Shall we go out?"

She held up her mantilla, and he arranged it about her shoulders tenderly. Then they went out through the conservatory on to the gravel path just below the terrace.

They waited some minutes in silence, his arm trembling a little under the light hand that rested upon it; and then of a sudden the nightingales began, "yug, yug, yug." They turned a little towards the lilac from which the song came, so that the light of the moon fell full upon them. He raised his finger, and then his hand, as if drawn by some subtle influence, fell swiftly upon hers, and he gathered it up, looking in her eyes.

There was no cry of despair from a breaking heart on the terrace above to strike his conscience with a sense of guilt; not a movement broke the silence but the long-drawn-out "pur—pur—pur" of the nightingale, followed by his joyous, rollicking "rill, rill, rill, rill, rill." Yet the passionate impulse that led him to take Olga's hand in his, the delicious joy of possession that transported him as Olga, yielding her hand without resistance, turned her eyes, glistening in the moonlight, slowly to his, was swiftly followed by a pang of remorse as she drooped her head and waited with a smile on her lips, for the declaration of love and the offer of marriage which ought to follow. He unclasped her hand conscience-smitten as a vision of Evelyn flashed upon his imagination. He saw, as distinctly as if he had turned and looked up at the terrace those mirthful, loving eyes of hers filled with sad reproach.

"What have I done?" he asked himself in that instant with more than a murderer's contrition. He felt not only treacherous to her but faithless to himself, the destroyer of her happiness and his own self-respect.

There was no formal engagement between them, but perhaps for that reason he felt the tie more binding—so much being left to his honor. On the other hand, he had as yet made no offer to Olga. He might have left unsaid the thing she expected him to say, but he recoiled from shirking the consequences of his act. It seemed to him that it would disgrace the character of English gentlemen to leave matters as they stood, to shuffle out of the position he had placed himself in. What could she think of him or any man who took advantage of her confidence and seized this opportunity for an advance which he would not dare to make if they were not alone? To be silent when he had led her on to believe that he should offer marriage was an insult scarcely to be tolerated by a common tavern wench. These reflections occurred to him in

the moment that his hand took to fall like lead by his side, and were followed by the question, "What am I to do?"—a question involving the choice between two forms of action, which must as briefly be decided.

Happily, from this dilemma he was, for the time, relieved by the voice of Major Caldecott exclaiming in the conservatory—

"By George! what a night for romance."

"Hark, the nightingale!" said Olga, turning towards him with ready self-possession.

"Yug, yug, yug, yug," called the nightingale, and Evelyn, falling back into the shadow, buried her face in her hands, trying to shut out all sight and sound of joy.

"I must settle this question to-night," Lesley said as he went home. "It's useless to stand shilly-shallying like an ass between two fields of clover."

So with this determination he changed his shoes, lit a big pipe, and started off for a meditative walk. To be false to Evelyn or false to Olga: which of the two evils was the lesser? Inclination must be set aside, and he honestly tried to settle the question in the abstract, and put Olga's charms out of his mind. By the time he reached Straly it had resolved itself to this: he must render himself a mean cad in the eyes of Olga, or he must break Evelyn's heart. Well, when it came to that, there seemed no choice left to him: he must give up Olga. Independent of the self-degradation that was involved, it needed a cruel wrench to get her out of his heart. But just then, coming in sight of the little inn where he had lunched with Evelyn, his affection for her obtained the ascendancy.

"Oh, dear old Evelyn is the wife for me!" he said to himself again. "She's only too good for such a fellow as I am."

Then the practical difficulties of the situation had to be met. It wouldn't do to hang about Olga now. If she forgave him he would probably commit himself again; and besides that, Evelyn might discover the real state of his feelings. It was a wonder to him, after past experiences of a somewhat similar kind, that she had not already suspected the truth. No, it would not do to stay in Pangbourne. He must go away. ("O Lord," he groaned at the thought.) But what excuse could he make? He had not settled that point, when he fell asleep in his armchair

hours after. But help came in the morning. On the breakfast table lay a letter in his father's characteristically careful handwriting. There was very little correspondence between the Right Honorable and his son—not a great deal of sympathy may be—one being so diplomatic, the other so impulsive. So Lesley broke the envelope with some curiosity to know what was inside.

"DEAR LESLEY," the letter began, "in pursuance of the subject under discussion on Sunday night, I beg you as a favor to quit Pangbourne for a time. I have received certain additional information—not reliable, but disquieting—with respect to our new acquaintance there, which makes this course urgently desirable. I am aware that flight will be objectionable to you. You will consider it pusillanimous in view of your own self-respect. Most young men believe themselves especially strong where they happen to be weak. But the general ceases to be a good soldier when bravery leads him to jeopardize his position. You have your Balaklava to avoid. Do as I desire, and believe me, your affectionate father,

"CHARLES DEXTER DUNBAR."

"P.S.—There is an affair at Berlin, which I wish you personally to conclude within forty-eight hours if possible."

Lesley crossed the river as soon as he had finished breakfast.

Evelyn's maid was crossing the lawn.

"Is breakfast finished?" he asked.

"No, sir. Some of the ladies are not down yet. The princess is in the breakfast room."

"Miss Caldecott?"

"I think she's still in her room."

Lesley wrote a few words on the back of a card, and sent it up. Then he seated himself under the cedar. In a few minutes he heard the rustle of a skirt on the terrace, and rising met Evelyn on the steps. It struck him that she looked pale.

"I want to tell you something, Evelyn," he said, taking her hand. "Shall we walk up and down here?"

"Not—not here," she said. "The terrace is so cold. Let us go in the sun."

"I am going away for awhile," he said, breaking the

silence as they walked over the lawn beyond the cedar. She looked up at him with a strange expression on her face, but it was not surprise. "And I thought I should like to tell you first," he continued, "because—because there's no one else cares for me so much as you do."

"Why are you going away?" she asked, quite coldly.

"Well, you know, there's an affair at Berlin the Right Honorable wishes me to settle."

"Is that the only reason, Lesley?"

"Well—" he hesitated.

"Have you seen Miss Zassoulitch this morning?" she asked, not waiting for the evasion.

"No," he answered, as he looked at her unusually anxious face in perplexity.

"Do you wish to see her before you go?" again speaking hurriedly, as if to convince herself upon some point of doubt.

"To tell the truth, I would like to get out of that if possible. If I could catch the next train it would be well. I ought to be in Berlin within forty-eight hours."

"Oh, Lesley!" she exclaimed, showing emotion for the first time; "I know all. It isn't for your father you are going to Berlin; it's for my sake. For my sake you wasted a day upon the river; for my sake you gave me the first dance."

"For whose sake should I give it, if not for yours?"

"For your own, if you loved me. But you don't love me, Lesley;" her voice quivered, and she stifled the rising sob. "I know that now. It is affection you feel for me—not love. I thought they were both one, but they are not. I can never be anything more to you than a friend—always a dear friend."

"What more can I ask for? A man's wife should be his dearest friend."

"Oh! it would be misery to think I was no more than that—to feel there was no response in my husband's heart to this something in mine, which is more than affection." The sob broke now through her faltering voice, and she turned away for a minute to chase the tears from her eyes and brace up her courage. Then, recovering herself and commencing with an effort, she said, passionately, "Lesley, Lesley, my dear friend, my comrade of old times, my boy sweetheart, my hero, be true to yourself. You must not go away until you have seen

Olga. You must go on and finish what is begun. It is as ill to give your heart without your hand as your hand without your heart; add, oh, Lesley, I love myself too well to be your wife, and I love you too well to let you stoop to dishonor. I give up my lover, but I cling to my friend; and I do not think I could still believe you my friend if you went away and left the reputation of a coward behind you."

CHAPTER XL

ROGUES BOTH.

"I CAN'T defend myself; I can only pray you to be merciful," said Lesley, deeply moved, not less by Evelyn's emotion than by admiration of her spirit and tenderness.

"Oh, if there is anything to forgive!" she exclaimed, holding out both hands with impulsive generosity. "We can't command our hearts, Lesley; I know that."

"That's true enough, I daresay," he answered; "but there's a lot to forgive, all the same. A fellow who finds temptation in his way ought to get out of it sharp if he hasn't the strength to overcome it. That's what I didn't do, and what I deserve to be punished for not doing. I want you to do something more than forgive me: I want you to retract the sentence you have passed upon me. Give me another chance—a respite at least. You must. The folly of a moment is not to be punished by a life-long loss like that. Think how we know each other, and how really deep the affection must be that has been rooting itself in our hearts so many years. Think what we must lose if your decision were final, for, if we are to abandon the thought of marriage, we can't even be friends."

"Oh, Lesley."

"I say we can't. It wouldn't work. It never did and never will. We should avoid meeting each other—get out of each other's way to escape unpleasant ideas, instead of seeking each other to renew happy ones. If our engagement is to be broken, we must never hope to meet

again. I can't bear to think of that, and I won't try. Listen to me, Evelyn."

He held her hands firmly, and looked straight in her face with an earnest strength in his countenance which had always commanded her admiration. She loved him in this mood, and delighted in submitting to his guidance, as all women do when the men they love command. It gave her confidence in him, and, shaking her faith in the justice of her own conclusions, brightened her heart with a gleam of hope.

"Listen to me," he repeated. "All is not over between us—no, nor anything like it. I shall go away for three weeks—I must be back for your father's silver wedding—and in that time, if I do not shake off my deep infatuation, and if I do not return better worthy of your trust, you may cast me off, and I will make no appeal against your decision."

A faint smile fluttered over Evelyn's face as she brushed away a tear. Then, with a sudden recollection of the other difficulty, she said in a tone of deep anxiety—

"But Olga?"

"Oh! I'll go up and see her at once. If needs be I'll tell her all; there's less shame in owning up to one's folly than in persevering in it, right or wrong. But I don't think there will be any necessity, and in that case the matter may well stand over till I come back. Hang it all, Evelyn, she's not a child; and at a dance girls must expect to go through little experiences of that kind. *You* know that. I don't say a fellow's conduct in such cases is defensible, but it's a sort of thing he can't always help. No matter how my relations with you might be affected, my intentions with regard to her would remain unshaken. You may refuse to be my wife, but you can't compel me to marry her, and, by George, I won't; and I'll tell her so if—it's necessary."

But it was not necessary. Olga met him with her usual complacency, and when he looked at his watch she was the first to rise and offer her hand in saying "good-bye." She was never ungracious. Only an acute observer would have detected the faint indication of sarcasm in the long smiling regard which accompanied her protracted bow of farewell. She understood quite well why he had gone away, and was not in the least distressed. Lesley was very nice in his way, she said to herself, but too

young for her. She also admired strength, and as yet she had seen no sign of it in his character. Possibly had Lesley made her an offer of marriage then, she would have refused him, for she had caught but a glimpse of Evelyn's face as she and Lesley came up the lawn side by side; that glimpse, in conjunction with certain quiet observations made the night before, had revealed the truth, and she had discovered that Evelyn's attachment was stronger than she had admitted. Olga was not a heartless and designing adventuress; her disposition was considerate and generous. Her worldliness was not aggressive. She wished to escape the horrors of destitution, but that wish, urgent and unbated as it was, would not have led her to secure her own welfare by inflicting misery upon her friend.

In bidding "farewell" to Lesley that morning, she resolutely dismissed from her consideration all thought of becoming his wife. Indeed, she began to look upon marriage as a very doubtful means of extricating herself from her present precarious position, and a means, moreover, which she regarded with growing repugnance as the immediate pressure of circumstances diminished. Among the marriageable men visiting the Caldecotts who paid her most attention, there was none whom she preferred to Lesley, none whom she liked so well, despite his weakness, and this was a reason stronger, perhaps, than any feeling of principle for recoiling from a matrimonial speculation.

But that expedient could not be wholly abandoned before another was found to take its place. For though the Parkers showed no symptoms of discontent, or even impatience, it was obvious to her that they would cease to support her grandfather and her in their present condition when they realized that nothing was to be got by it. She had to make many allowances for the eccentric and tenacious character of the English to explain their present attitude, but it was preposterous to suppose that they should maintain that attitude very long without some definite prospect of realizing the expectations on which their speculation was based. The terrible possibility was ever present in her mind that Parker at any favorable moment would say—

"We have made a miscalculation; things have not turned out as we anticipated. We certainly expected,

from your grandfather's brilliant opening at Onslow Square that he would marry the wealthy Miss Baggs, of Chicago. But he hasn't even taken the trouble to keep up an enthusiastic correspondence with her since he has been here. Nor does he seem disposed to make any conquest in the place of the other. He does not take such pains to please as he did. His gush is not as it used to be. When he is not discussing philosophy and politics and smoking the major's cigars, he sits absorbed apparently in profound thought. He looks very beautiful with that look of abstraction on his noble face, but it isn't business. It may suit him admirably, but it doesn't suit us—not at all. We are not less disappointed in you. Certainly you have not as many chances of captivating a wealthy *parti* here as you had in town, but you don't make the most of the chances you have. You seem to forget this is an affair of business, and occupy yourself in passing the time as agreeably as possible to yourself. We are practical, and as you must admit, not unreasonable. You will, therefore, see the necessity of concluding this arrangement at once and returning to Houndsditch, say, to-morrow morning."

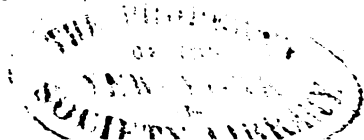
Such a crisis was made more eminently probable by the departure of Lesley, and that day, Olga, in the spirit of forlorn hope, began the history of her escape from Siberia, and, as the major had, as yet, got no further than the word "Preface" on page I, she wrote in her own room, and said not a word about it, for fear of wounding his susceptibilities.

Ivan Zassoulitch was not troubled by any apprehensions of an abrupt termination of his arrangement with the Parkers. He had taken an early occasion of coming to a complete understanding with his man.

His blindness furnished him with a delicate excuse for not eating at the same table with his host. In his own room he was waited upon by Parker. Dining in this way alone, the meal was quickly finished, and there was usually a good half-hour for strolling in the garden with a cigarette before the company in the dining-room rose from the table. This was the time he chose for opening his mind to Parker.

"In what part of the garden are we, Parker?" he asked.

"On the lawn, prince."



"At some distance from the house?"

"A hundred yards, prince."

"I thought so by the sounds that reach my ears occasionally. Do you speak Russian, Parker?"

"No, prince."

"And you are not a Jew?"

"No, prince."

"I thought you might be, as you are connected with Mr. David McAllister."

"The prince will pardon me. I am not acquainted with Mr. David McAllister."

"Well, with his man, Phillips," Zassoulitch said, with a wave of his cigarette; "it's all the same. I repeat, you cannot understand Russian or Hebrew?"

"We are quite alone, prince," Parker said, significantly.

"You are sure?"

"Quite, prince."

"I understand; you address me in that way to avoid falling into error at inconvenient seasons."

"The prince is quite right."

"I shall keep my ears open. You shall use your eyes. If you see any one, pinch my arm."

"I will, prince."

After a few moments of silence, Zassoulitch spoke—

"Parker, have you reflected what an awkward position it would place us in—my granddaughter and me—if you got hold of the major's diamonds and bolted 'suddenly'?"

"I have not given that point a great deal of attention, prince."

"I have. It would leave us in a very awkward position indeed. Not only should we have no servants to attend us, but no means of maintaining our position here. That would possibly lead to a suspicion that our connection with you was, to say the least of it, compromising. Do you follow, Parker?"

"Perfectly, prince."

"You have no provision to offer against such a contingency, I suppose?"

"No, prince."

"Has it struck you, Parker," the old man asked, after a few silent whiffs, "that, on the other hand, it would be very awkward for you if it served my purpose to tell the whole truth to Major Caldecott and have you arrested by the police?"

"It did occur to Mrs. Parker that such a thing might happen."

"And what did you reply?"

"I pointed out that the prince's own interests would prevent his doing that, since it would ruin any chance of the princess making an advantageous match."

"The interests of the princess and mine are not in the least connected. If it suited me to leave her entirely to her own resources, I should do it. I have no illusions. My granddaughter has nothing in common with me. I would not trust her in anything connected with our business arrangements. Understand that."

"I do, prince. But I also pointed out to Mrs. Parker that the prince would ruin his own chance of marrying Miss Baggs."

"Hum! It may take me some months to make sure of that advantage. I should think it will be but a few weeks before you get the diamonds. So you see, Parker, that is no security at all for you."

"Has the prince any better to offer?"

"Yes. Make me a partner in the business with a share of the profits," Zassoulitch answered, dropping his voice to a murmur.

"I shall have to consult with Mrs. Parker and the parties who are backing us up before I can give the prince any definite answer to that."

"That's reasonable. You will talk it over with your wife to-night. I'll find a commission for you to execute in London to-morrow evening which will enable you to see the other parties."

"There's no harm in that, prince. Of course it's only fair, that if we do pull it off—"

"We will 'pull it off,'" said Zassoulitch with eager enthusiasm, his face flushing like a gamester's under the passion of play.

Parker looked sidelong at him in admiration.

"And certainly the prince could do a lot to help."

Zassoulitch nodded eagerly.

"There's a lot to find out before anything can be done."

Again Zassoulitch nodded.

"To begin with, the prince might find out what there is to share."

"I'll find that out to-morrow. You shall know as soon as you give me a satisfactory answer to my proposal."

"I don't think we shall fall out with the prince about that. Fair's fair. If I'm not mistaken, it's not the first time the prince has been in a job of this kind."

"Ah! if you knew, if you knew," murmured the old man, with a play of his long, slight fingers, as if he were passing strings of diamonds through them.

"One thing's pretty certain: the prince has got his heart in the business."

Where else should my heart be? You're young; wait till you're as old as I am. Why, there's not a business in the world yields such delight. The passion of the statesman—the passion of the gambler—the passion of the miser, all are combined in this trade of ours. We combine, we calculate, we lay our plans, we build up our hopes slowly, we wait, we watch, and then at last we stake our very lives upon the cast and——"

"Hold on, prince; the princess is on the terrace."

CHAPTER XII.

ZASSOULITCH FEELS HIS GROUND.

THE next afternoon Zassoulitch found a plausible pretext for sending Parker up to town for the purpose of laying his proposal, which amounted almost to an ultimatum, before the mysterious parties in league with Parker to steal Major Caldecott's diamonds, and after dinner, being alone with the major in the smoking room, he carefully led up the conversation to the subject of diamonds.

The simple major desired nothing more than to talk about his hobby, and being set going, he ran on with indefatigable volubility. It was a subject on which he never tired—himself. It was, perhaps, the first time he had ever got the chance to tell all he knew about his black diamonds, how he had come by them, and the exhaustive history of each particular gem in the collection. Up to now, the story had been broken off, no one having the patience to stand much more of it than an hour at a stretch. But in Ivan Zassoulitch he had a rare listener, who showed no fidgety sign of impatience, and never attempted to

turn the subject, but rather kept it alive by pertinent comments and leading questions.

Mrs. Caldecott and Evelyn and Olga came in during the course of the evening, sat down for a time, and then withdrew; but old Zassoulitch sat patiently on, though in the end the sum of information acquired amounted to no more than this—there were twenty-one lesser crystals of various sizes, worth, roughly, ten thousand pounds, and one large one, worth another ten thousand.

At length the major sank back in his chair exhausted, saying, with a sigh,—

“Ah! I only wish you could see them.”

“Yes, I should like to see them also,” Zassoulitch replied in his calm, philosophic tones. “That great diamond has an interest for me, such as I feel when men talk of Niagara or any other marvel of nature; but with this difference that, while I could handle the diamond, weigh it in my palms, measure its proportions, and realize its form, the mighty fall is beyond the grasp of my imagination even.”

“Why, to be sure; I never thought of that! The sense of touch may be even more to you than sight to me. Would you like to examine them?”

“It is a pleasure I should have begged if you had not offered it—one day.”

“I’ll fetch them down at once,” the major said with new delight; “or will you come upstairs.”

“They are too precious to be carried about on trifling occasions. I will come up.”

He rose and took the major’s arm, but his disengaged hand was extended from his side, lightly examining everything with which he came in contact. At the door he began to make mental notes:—

From the smoking-room, turn to the right, six moderate paces, an umbrella stand. Nine paces obliquely to the right, fourteen stairs, a carved head on the balustrade. Two paces sharp to the left, another carved head. Sharp again to the left, six stairs, a third carved head. Again sharp to the left, ten paces—stop.

“Ah, the key’s inside,” said the major, trying the door before them. “We must go through my bedroom.”

Zassoulitch renewed his notes.

Wall on the left, panels. Eight paces, a door. From the door obliquely to the right, six moderate paces, an-

other door. Two paces straight forward, stop, stuffed chair.

"Sit down here," said the major. "I must light the gas."

Zassoulitch sat down and recapitulated his notes. From the smoking-room door turn to the right, six moderate paces, an umbrella stand. Nine more paces obliquely to the right, fourteen stairs, a carved head on the balustrade. Two paces sharp to the left, a second carved head. Sharp again to the left, six stairs, a third carved head. Again sharp to the left, ten paces, stop. First door. Wall on the left panelled. Eight paces and then second door—the door. Entering by the door, six paces to the right obliquely, another door. Two paces, a chair. Something at my feet!

"Is this a dog?" he asked.

"Oh, yes. Lie down, Jack. He won't hurt any one with me. I wouldn't answer for him if any one came in here without me."

Zassoulitch made another mental note of that.

The major lit the gas and then unlocked a door.

"Is that cupboard strong?" asked Zassoulitch, after noticing that the sound of the bolt came from an uncertain distance directly before him.

"It's an iron safe," replied the major, with a laugh. "Not a big one, but too large to carry off, and the best I could get. Oh, I'm not so careless as some people think."

"You have never mislaid the key by accident?"

"Impossible. It's ringed on to my watch guard, and goes with my watch under the pillow every night. There," putting a diamond in the old man's hand from the open box brought from the safe, "that's the big crystal—the beauty that I can find no name for."

Zassoulitch took it between his palms and passed his nervous fingers lovingly over its surface, while the major, seating himself, looked on, smiling like a mother when her child is under admiration. For half an hour the old man sat gloating over the treasures, and nodding gently to the major's comments, but thinking of nothing save the joy of possession.

"You ought to guard them carefully," he said, when at last they were restored to the box.

"Indeed I ought. Not for my own sake alone; all my fortune is in them, save a life annuity, bought with the

rest of my capital: If these were lost I should leave my wife and Evelyn unprovided for. That's a reflection to make a man careful, isn't it?"

"You can't be too careful."

"Oh, I don't believe in overdoing it—making a care of my pleasure. Why should I? Really, you know, there's nothing to fear. Birds of a feather flock together, and I maintain that an honest man with an honest family gets honest people about him."

"That is a philosophical truth, and the reverse is equally just. A dishonest man will as surely get hold of dishonest servants."

"I'd trust mine anywhere," the major said putting the box back in the safe. "But I don't, you know," he added, with a laugh; "opportunity makes a thief sometimes." He locked the safe, and turning to pat the terrier, "You wouldn't give any one the opportunity, would you, Jack? You'd let me know if the cook even came in here, eh? A nice old doggy. And I've another protector here," he continued, addressing Zassoulitch, as he unhooked an army revolver from the wall. "A friend who's stood by me as faithfully as old Jack—one who never yet barked without biting." He put the revolver in the old man's hand for a moment and then returned it to its place.

"Of course, you have little to fear from robbers of the violent kind?" observed Zassoulitch.

"Not a scrap; that's what I tell McAllister. He has a fad, you know, for making burglary impossible by means of electricity. Communicating wire with neighbors and the nearest police station, and that sort of rubbish. He would have me fit one of his precious inventions on my safe, but, God bless you! I never use it. It certainly isn't on now or we should have woke up the house when I opened the door."

"May I ask what kind of appliance it is, and how it works?"

"Why, there's a little button just under the door of the safe (no one is supposed to know anything about it except myself and my family, I may tell you). No one can see it, for the safe is only raised a couple of inches from the floor, and you have to slip your finger under to feel it. Well, when the button is turned so as to stand at a right angle with the door it connects a circuit or something. Then the opening of the door acts as a switch, if I'm not

mistaken, and sets bells ringing in my bedroom and all the living rooms below. The bells are concealed behind pictures, and when that door opens there's an uproar all over the house and every one is in a fright. That's partly why I never set it."

"Marvellous ingenuity of mankind!" exclaimed Zassoulitch in a tone of reverential awe. "Wonderful—almost incredible."

"I'll just put it on and you shall hear the result. There, now the button's turned."

The major opened the door. At once the jingle of an electric bell in the next room was heard, and the next moment doors opened below, and a chorus of frightened voices called the major. With a hearty laugh he went to the head of the stairs.

"It's only Mr. David McAllister," he called in allusion to the friend who had persuaded him to employ the alarm.

At the sound of his voice out there, Zassoulitch started to his feet. He had settled clearly in his own mind whereabouts the safe stood by his sense of hearing while Major Caldecott stood there explaining the mechanism of the signal. The door was open, and the coveted prize was almost within reach; the major was still on the landing. It was possible to get possession of the crystals, secrete them, and regain his seat before the major returned. Would he look in the safe again before closing the door on his return? It was improbable. But the possibility was obvious, and the rashness of the venture too evident. With a sigh that was almost a groan the old man sank back into his chair.

The major, still laughing, came back, cut off the current, shut the door, and turned the key, without a glance inside.

"The servants must have heard the bells," Zassoulitch observed.

"Oh, yes: but they suppose them connected with the push in my room," replied the major. "Will you take my arm?"

Zassoulitch accepted the offer, and they went downstairs, the old man confirming the observations he had made in coming up; but to these notes he added—

"The safe is raised two inches from the floor. Slipping one's finger under the door, one finds the button, which, turned at a right angle with the door, completes the circuit, and sets the signal to be given by the opening of the door."

When Zassoulitch was taking his after dinner cigarette in the garden the next evening, he said in a tone hardly above a whisper to his silent attendant—

"You saw your friend yesterday, Parker?"

"Yes, prince."

"Well, what does he say?"

"The party is agreeable to the prince coming into the concern."

"Of course. You could do nothing without me. However, we'll say nothing more about that. What are the terms?"

"In consideration of the prince lending all the assistance possible, the party agrees to his taking a fair share in the profits. There are four of us—that will give a quarter to the prince."

"I expected half."

"I am instructed to say that the prince will get no more than a fourth. He can take it or leave it. In the latter case, we must trouble the prince to leave here to-morrow morning and return our property."

Zassoulitch nodded half a dozen times with a cynical smile at this realization of a foregone conclusion, and then said—

"You will give me the party's name, as a guarantee of good faith?"

"Can't be done, prince—at any rate, not yet awhile. But as this is only one of a series of—of transactions, the prince will see that it is to our interests to play fair."

"Good, good; very good!" exclaimed the old man, in a suppressed tone of enthusiasm. "I am not mistaken in the 'party,' Parker. He is a man of broad views—of large enterprises—a man who strides to keep pace with the times. I accept his offer without a murmur. Ah, he will find he's not mistaken in me. I've begun business already."

"You have, prince!"

"Yes. I've handled the diamonds—oh, there must be no reserve between us!—I've had them in my hands. I might have made away with them before you came back this morning. But I expected the series, Parker, and wouldn't ruin a big undertaking for a limited gain."

"You've had 'em in your hands, prince!"

"Twenty-one of them. But we've work to do before we can get them into our hands again. You know where *they are kept?*"

"In the iron safe."

"In the safe, yes. Do you know where he the owner keeps the key?"

"No."

"Riveted on his watch chain. We must get that key."

"Or another."

"Or another. He relies entirely on the safe."

"Nothing else."

"Oh, there's a revolver and a dog. The dog must be got out of the way; the revolver won't be needed."

"There's nothing else—no electric arrangement?" Parker asked, with a keen glance at his master.

"None!" Zassoulitch answered, emphatically. "There was some affair of that kind, as the 'party' has told you, I dare say; but it defeated its own end—as was intended. The thing alarmed the house every time the safe was opened. Sometimes it was employed; sometimes overlooked. It became worse than useless, and the major finally cut the wires."

Ivan Zassoulitch had very little faith in honor of any kind—none at all in thieves' honor; and he already foresaw that he might need the alarm as his own safeguard.

CHAPTER XIII.

A POISONED CIGARETTE.

IN imparting what had taken place to his wife, Parker expressed his admiration of Zassoulitch as loudly as secrecy permitted and acknowledged him a master of his art.

"Upon my word," he muttered, in conclusion, "I don't know what we should do without him. We were told that this major was a careless man; but he's not, and I should throw up the job as hopeless if we hadn't got the prince to help us."

"What is he going to do?" asked Mrs. Parker, pertinently.

"He didn't say. We were cut short to-night. But I know well enough he has it planned out in that long head of his. He's a genius, and is hot on the job. I shall hear *all about it to-morrow.*"

"I hope you will ; and take care he isn't too clever—that's all," said Mrs. Parker.

But Zassoulitch, after that first outbreak of zeal, became remarkably reticent, and for many days Parker had nothing further to communicate to his wife. The old man basked in the sun on the lawn, smoking eternal cigarettes, with Parker close at hand, and no one to overhear him, without referring by a single word to the subject in their minds.

At length Parker, urged on by the nocturnal nagging of his wife, one evening broke the silence.

"May I ask," he said, respectfully, after a glance round, to be certain they were alone, "when the prince thinks of leaving Pangbourne?"

"About the 17th or 18th, Parker."

"And to-day's the 7th, prince."

"It is."

"And we've done nothing, prince, up to now."

"*You* have done nothing, Parker. I have done a great deal—of thinking."

"Very likely, prince ; but that's about all the prince has done ; and if I may be allowed to say so I think it's about time we got on to something practical."

"There's plenty of time. The business cannot be done until the house is full of people. On the 15th—perhaps before—there will be a great many visitors in the house."

"But we must make some preparation beforehand."

"True ; and, as you say, it's about time to begin. Now, let me hear what you propose to do in a practical way, Parker."

"Well, there's the dog to be got out of the way ; might begin that at once."

"How?"

"Poison him, prince, slowly. I know how to do it. He'll be a week dying."

"That leaves another week for the major to get a new dog, or set the alarm in working order. The dog must be poisoned—killed in two minutes. But not yet awhile."

"Don't see how I'm to get at the safe while he's there," objected Parker.

"Why do you want to get at the safe before the 15th?"

"To take an impression of the lock and get a key."

Zassoulitch rolled his head reflectively as he lay back

in the chair, letting a stream of smoke issue slowly from his lips.

"That attempt has ruined some of the best undertakings that were ever planned," he said; "a piece of wax sticks in a ward; it is found on the key, and leads to untimely discovery. Your notions are all old-fashioned—not worthy of you and your age, Parker. You ought to think more if you sincerely wish to get on in your profession."

"May I ask if the prince has got anything better to suggest?" asked Parker, with just a dash of asperity—his self-esteem being wounded by this rebuke and the recollection of Mrs. Parker's heckling overnight.

"Yes, my cigarettes are getting low. To-morrow you shall go to Reading and buy me some of the finest Latakia and a machine to make cigarettes. At the same time you shall take a prescription to a druggist and get it made up. You have wax, I daresay?"

"Oh, yes; that's all ready."

"Then with these I think we may safely get what we want in a few days, without killing the dog yet awhile, or fumbling about at the safe."

The next night, when Parker had taken off his master's coat and put on his dressing-gown, Zassoulitch set him to making up the tobacco into cigarettes with the machine he had brought from Reading.

As he turned them out the old man examined them critically with his long thin fingers one after the other, until at least fifty had passed through his hands and been laid on the table beside him; then he said—

"That will do, Parker. You make them very regular and even now. Put what are finished in a box for ordinary use; now lay out enough tobacco for seven more," his voice sinking to a murmur, certainly not to be heard out of the room.

"I have done that, prince."

"You have the little powder you brought from the chemist?"

"Here it is, prince," Parker answered, in a voice hushed by expectancy and excitement.

"Mix it carefully with the Latakia—not breaking the tobacco more than you can help."

He smoked on patiently until Parker told him that the thing was done.

"Make it up into seven cigarettes—carefully."

Again he smoked, calmly silent, until the cigarettes were put into his hand. He selected one, and gave the remaining six to Parker.

"Put these in the little morocco case—of course, by themselves."

"That's done, prince."

"Now get the smelling salts out of my case."

He threw away the end of the cigarette he had been smoking and sat up as Parker returned with the salts; then having taken a sniff at the bottle to assure himself that the salts were strong, he coolly placed the cigarette last made by Parker between his lips, and demanded a light. Parker struck a vesta.

"You will apply the salts when you think it is necessary," said the old man, and then quietly presented the cigarette for Parker to light.

He tasted the first whiff of smoke in the way of a connoisseur, and then he leant back in his chair and puffed slowly. At the third whiff a spasm of pain distorted his face, and the next moment the cigarette fell from his gaping mouth, a cramp convulsed his members, drawing up his arms and crooking his fingers; then, as if a spring had broken, the muscles relaxed: his hands dropped like lead by his side, and his head rolled from the cushion of his chair.

Parker, looking on aghast at the result of this experiment, stood motionless for a minute; then he quickly applied the salts. In a few minutes Zassoulitch regained consciousness, and stretched out his hands vaguely.

"All right now, prince?" whispered Parker, in a voice still agitated by his terror.

"Yes, yes; that will do," Zassoulitch answered, adding, as he regained strength, "When I tell you that I have no cigarettes, you will fetch me these—and your wax at the same time."

Fortune favored the rascals the very next morning.

Zassoulitch made it a rule to take a constitutional walk every morning. When it was wet, he took Parker; when dry, Mrs. Caldecott or Evelyn accompanied him. Occasionally, when the major felt unequal to literary application, he would be the old man's companion. That was the case on this occasion.

The two gentlemen started off in the direction of Goring, Zassoulitch with his hand linked in the major's arm;

Parker following in the rear at a respectful distance, carrying his master's inverness and umbrella.

"Dear me!" exclaimed the major, when they had gone about a couple of hundred yards, "I've left my weeds behind. Can you give me a cigarette?"

"With pleasure," replied Zassoulitch, diving his hand in his pocket. "Curious coincidence," he continued, after tapping one pocket after the other, "I've done the same thing." Then turning round, he said, "Parker, I have no cigarettes."

Parker turned about, and was round the corner before the major, who greatly preferred a cigar, could tell him to bring his cigar case at the same time.

They walked on slowly, Zassoulitch easily taking up the thread of conversation where it had been broken off. His talk was always interesting, provoking arguments which he conducted with the most suave deference to his opponent's opinions. When he gave himself the trouble to argue, it was not with a view to scoring a triumph, but to winning a certain amount of goodwill and respect, which was much more valuable in the long run. Military organization was the subject of their present debate, and Zassoulitch had brought the simple major to a delightful belief that he had certainly got the best of it, when Parker, seeing the road clear in both directions, overtook them.

"Cigarettes, prince."

Zassoulitch finished the sentence he had begun, as he took the case from Parker and opened it.

"You may be quite right there," retorted the major; "but—oh, thanks," and he took a cigarette.

Parker lit a vesta and offered it. Zassoulitch took a cigarette from the case and put it between his lips. Parker struck another vesta; it went out. He lit a second, waiting for the flame to rise before offering it to his master.

"But, as I was saying"—the major took a whiff at his cigarette, and rolled it between his lips—"the three arms of the service—" Puff—

"Light, prince," said Parker.

Zassoulitch, without hesitation, inhaled a whiff of the poisoned tobacco without the slightest appearance of concern. But he had no need to go further.

"Good God! what's the matter with me? Parker!"

exclaimed the major, who had been vigorously pulling at his cigarette.

"What is the matter?" asked Zassoulitch, still holding his cigarette between his fingers. Never had he so keenly felt the loss of sight as at that moment.

"Mr Caldecott's fainting, prince!" said Parker, still maintaining the character of an astonished servant.

"He can't stand; he's fallen to the ground!"

"Is any one coming who can help?" asked Zassoulitch, with assumed alarm.

"Not a soul in sight, prince," Parker answered, after a hasty glance to the right and left.

"Shake his arm—speak to him," exclaimed Zassoulitch.

Parker obeyed the order, and seeing that the desired effect was produced wasted no more words. The major wore a double chain attached to his watch in one pocket, to the safe key in the other. With the quick dexterity of a pickpocket, Parker whipped out the key, and taking a flat block of wax from his pocket pressed the two together, until a deep impression of the key was made in the wax. Separating them he examined both keenly to see if the impression were true, and that no traces of the wax were left on the key. Perfectly satisfied on these points he returned the key, replaced the wax in the tobacco box he had taken it from, and slipping it into his breast pocket, murmured, "done." Zassoulitch flung away his cigarette and drew a deep breath.

"Put this to his nostrils," he said, holding out a small bottle of volatile salts.

"The color is coming back into his face. He is better, prince."

"Thank Heaven," exclaimed Zassoulitch, in a loud and fervent voice.

In a little while the major was on his legs, marvelling, "What the deuce it could have been," while Parker assiduously dusted his coat with a handkerchief. Clearly, it couldn't have been the cigarette, for Zassoulitch had lit up at the same time and felt no ill effect; he came to the conclusion that the attack must have been indigestion—something wrong at the breakfast table—the *pâté* or the caviare, or some other potted rubbish, which should teach an Englishman to stick to his beef. However, he exacted a promise from Zassoulitch to say nothing about it at

home, lest the women—God bless their sympathetic souls!—should take it into their heads that there was something the matter with his heart. "And Parker, don't you mention it, if you please, downstairs," he added, fishing out a sovereign from his pocket as a reward for his past service.

Neither Zassoulitch nor Parker did mention the incident, and the only allusion to it was made by the major, jocosely at the breakfast table the next morning. "I'll take beef this morning; with all deference to you, Zassoulitch, I don't care much for caviare."

Parker begged for half a day off, and got it. He went up to London with the wax impression, and returned with a key facsimile in its working parts with the major's. He told Zassoulitch that he had it, but did not offer to let him hold it.

On the 12th, when they had an opportunity of conversing secretly, Parker said, with a slight hesitation in his manner, "It's the twelfth, prince. Don't you think we might get rid of the dog now? He runs upstairs whenever he wants a snooze. It's never safe there."

That implied that Parker or his wife had already been prowling about tentatively, but Zassoulitch kept the inference to himself.

"You will be so many thousands out of pocket if you kill him a day before the enterprise is to be carried out," he said, then after a pause he asked quickly.

"Why are you in such a hurry, Parker?"

"Oh, I'm not in a hurry, prince, but——"

"Mrs. Parker is," Zassoulitch said, concluding the sentence. "Parker, it's not the first time a man has been ruined by his wife's impatience. Mark me, you'll have to get rid of Mrs. Parker as well as the dog if you wish to make your fortune."

The next day, Zassoulitch reopened the subject.

"Is the dog still alive," he asked.

"Yes, prince. I put my foot down about that. The prince is right. I can do it easily before breakfast on Friday. The place will be full to-morrow night, I hear."

"What are you going to do with the—the things when you get them?"

"Oh, we've settled all that. That's all arranged." Parker answered, a little rudely for him.

"Very good," said Zassoulitch, blandly. "Go up to my room and fetch me a silk handkerchief."

When Parker was gone the old man, clasping his long fingers over his knees, rocked himself backwards and forwards in meditation, each movement marking off a division of the subject under consideration.

"This is Mrs. Parker," he said to himself. "She's the clever one ; Parker is only an excellent tool in her hand. I'm another tool. She has got all she wanted out of me. Now I may go to the devil, if I choose. She has told Parker that I'm needed no more. He has just sense enough to see so far and no further. I know what you are going to do with the crystals, Mrs. Parker. You're going to bolt with them. You'd have bolted with them the day you got the key. But the dog was in the way. You'd have killed the dog and made an attempt at once, only Parker had more faith in my wisdom than in yours. And the mouse putting on the air of a lion, frightened you into submission. You think you will get the diamonds easily enough the day after to-morrow. And you will be quite prepared to bolt with them, But you won't bolt, my good woman. You think you are clever ; but you're a fool. Nothing better than a treacherous cat, whose paw shall rake out the chestnut for me."

CHAPTER XIV.

STRONGER THAN DUTY.

AFTER transacting the business in Berlin furnished for him by his father, Lesley, with the purpose of getting over his infatuation for Olga on a kind of homœopathic principle, went on to Vienna. But the distractions of that vivacious city failed to have any beneficial effect upon him. The sense of duty that suggested the expedient took away the small zest he had for dissipation. The earnest desire to be true to Evelyn ever present in his mind in itself precluded his taking the remedy he sought for his attachment to Olga. Female beauty of every type is to be found in Vienna ; but he saw nothing to admire.

The English girls he met gave him an attack of Anglophobia in its mild form—they were so extreme—so rigid and reserved, or such uncultured hoydens. The only face which had any charm for him was one in which he detected a slight resemblance to Olga's. He did his best to banish her from his mind, but she haunted him sleeping or waking, and with the vision came a sense of loss and desolation. He felt that something was gone out of his life—an irrecoverable joy which might have changed his destiny.

He certainly was not gay at this time, and his appearance in the public gardens or elsewhere helped to justify the belief that an Englishman takes his pleasures seriously. But as the time drew on to return to England he cheered up considerably, and at times his step became elastic and his countenance radiant under an exuberant flow of animal spirits which he did not seek to account for. Assuredly he was not thinking of Evelyn in those moments, for the thought of her was always accompanied by morbid reflections and grave resolutions which would have done credit to a man of fifty.

True to his promise, Lesley did not go down to Pangbourne until the 14th, and then his father went with him. Evelyn abandoned her last faint hope.

"If he had ceased to love Olga," she said to herself, "he would have returned a week ago—not waited till the last moment. And now to come with his father—as if he needed support. Oh! he still loves her; and life is very hard and very horrid."

She came across with her father soon after their arrival, the major anxious to get them to dine at his hospitable table; Evelyn to end her restless suspense. Lesley was a little more earnest than usual. Evelyn a little quieter; otherwise their meeting was exactly like a hundred others that had gone before.

"I am glad to see you looking so jolly," said Lesley, with an admiring glance, as they walked out of the garden and along the towpath. "By George! one must come back to England for such complexions as yours."

But when the excitement of meeting subsided, Evelyn's color disappeared, and he noticed that she was thinner and paler than she was wont to be. Till then he had been in high spirits, recounting some incidents in his journey with a good deal of humor—forcing the gayety, perhaps,

because she seemed a little quiet ; but the change in her appearance damped him at once with the conviction that she had suffered, and that he was the cause of her trouble. Poor Evelyn, she should suffer no longer, he said to himself ; he would prove that he could be strong where his will was concerned, and that he had not swerved in his purpose.

"Talking of Berlin," he said, dipping his fingers in his waistcoat pocket, and with no more change in his voice than he could help, "I bought something for you there, Eve." He opened the little case and took out a diamond ring.

Evelyn had some of her father's passion for diamonds, and the glitter of the pretty toy was reflected in her face as she looked at it, her trouble being forgotten for the moment.

"Oh, it is beautiful !" she exclaimed ; "and you are kind, Les," looking up with love beaming in her eyes.

"I knew you would like it, dear," he said, gently—a tone that thrilled her with delight, as it inspired the hope that she had been wrong after all, and he did really love her. Then with a return to his airy tone which brought about a revulsion in the girl's overstrung feelings, the sudden change of heat to cold in this fever of love, he said—

"I think I know the size of your finger. Let us see if I have guessed right."

She held out her finger and he slipped it on. It was several sizes too large for her—it would have gone on her thumb.

At another time she would have burst into laughter, and made a joke of his miscalculation, though at her own expense, but now she closed her other fingers to conceal the mistake in size, pretending that it fitted well, as she held her hand out, and the smile on her face was forced and untrue.

"He must have figured me with a hand like a cook's," she said to herself, bitterly.

"But is that your engaged finger ?" he asked, doubtfully.

She shook her head in silence, still looking at her ring.

"I ought to know, but I don't," he said. "Which is it ?"

She held up the other hand, still without a word, still

with that unnatural smile, which was almost a line of pain upon her face.

They were quite alone. He took her hand, and raised it to his lips.

"Oh! if he loved me, he would take me in his arms and kiss my lips though all the world were looking," she said to herself. She would have withdrawn her hand, but he held it.

"You will let me put the ring on that finger?" he said.

"Not yet. The time does not expire till to-morrow."

He did not see the covert reference to his own punctuality. He only noticed that her manner was cold and constrained. He let her hand drop.

It was all too evident to Evelyn. He had bought the ring in Berlin within a week of his lovemaking with Olga—before he could have forgotten it. The ring was a token of high principle, and not of deep feeling. He had stayed away till the last moment, because it was duty, and he would marry her for pity's sake. For a moment these reflections chilled her heart, and then the tide of generous feeling rushed back, and, accusing herself of injustice and mean caprice, she turned to Lesley, crying in a low, faltering voice,—

"Oh, do forgive me, dear! I am oversensitive, stupid, and unkind. The ring is beautiful. But it means so much. To-morrow, perhaps, you shall place it where it is to stay for all my life."

And with that she held up her face to be kissed.

As the party of four, having crossed the river, made their way to the tennis court from the boat-house, Lesley's heart fluttered, in spite of himself, with the near prospect of meeting Olga. Through the long, wide-sweeping arms of the cedar he saw the players moving, and a little on the right of them a group of bystanders. He knew she was there; he even distinguished, among the babble of voices, her musical tones and dainty articulation. How would she meet him? he asked himself. Would she scathe him with some witty sarcasm on his long absence? And what on earth should he say when the time came for him to tell her that since that little interview in the moonlight three weeks back he had made up his mind to marry some one else.

Olga was seated a little apart from the group, leaning

back in her chair, *vis-à-vis* with Lord George Betterton, who was leaning forward in his, his elbows on his knees, his chair tilting backwards and forwards, looking boldly into Olga's face as he drawled out his confounded badinage. That he was drawling badinage and of this particular description, was Lesley's presumption on recognizing his lordship.

"I knew he would come back—insufferable cad," said Lesley to himself, vexed because Olga seemed to find him not at all insufferable.

Olga gave her hand and smiled back with her characteristic inclination of the head, and showed no more embarrassment in meeting Lesley than if they had parted under ordinary conditions only the day before; and as he seemed to be rather ill at ease, she led the conversation with admirable tact on to a subject of general interest, in which Lord George took his drawling part until called away to play his set. And now, being left quite alone with Olga, Lesley felt that his hour had come; but, as if purposely to dispel his illusions, Olga, now that Betterton was gone, questioned Lesley about Berlin and Vienna, and when the talk began to wane in interest she rose, proposing that they should find their friend, Miss Caldecott.

"She knows all about it," said Lesley to himself, "and wouldn't accept me now if I made an offer. Setting aside the dictates of loyalty and friendship, I shouldn't think she would have me. I must be as contemptible to her as I am to myself."

He was perfectly right in his conclusions. At the dinner table he sat beside Evelyn, Betterton next to Olga on the opposite side, a little lower down. He made up his mind not to look across the table, and to devote himself entirely to Evelyn. But before long he found himself listening to the conversation on the other side, struck by the witty repartee of Olga, and envious of Betterton, who, under the stimulating effect of Olga's wit, really said one or two very smart things—for a lord. His own conversational powers forsook him. He seemed to have exhausted all the topics of conversation, and he was terribly conscious that what he did say was stupid and spiritless and flat. Then involuntarily he glanced across at Olga, and caught her face in profile, with that bewitching smile revealing her white, perfect teeth. After that it was im-

possible to prevent his eyes straying in that direction with an inner, unacknowledged longing for recognition on her part. Olga was superior to the feminine weakness of playing with a slave. She would not see him. Clearly she had quite done with him. Once or twice, though, Betterton met his regard, and a cool, insolent expression of amusement and triumph added not a little to Lesley's discomfort and feeling of self-abasement.

A thousand times he wished the dinner was over; so did poor Evelyn.

After dinner, Betterton proposed that they should drop down the river to his houseboat and take coffee. The invitation was accepted, the twilight of a summer's night being so charming on the river.

Evelyn and Olga took the stern, and sat in Lesley's dingy.

"Look he-ah," said Betterton, taking Lesley aside before starting. "We will toss for stroke." He covered a piece of money on the back of his hand.

"Head," said Lesley.

"T'other," said Betterton, with the same offensive look in his eyes as he uncovered the coin.

"You've lost, old chappie," he added, significantly.

So Lesley took the bow and pulled in silence, while Betterton, face to face with Olga and Evelyn, kept up a lively fire of talk with both.

It was late when they left the houseboat. Some of the party preferred walking back to Pangbourne, and amongst them Olga, and consequently Betterton. This arrangement gave Evelyn and Lesley the dingy to themselves. They were a little behind the rest in starting. Lesley was grateful for the stiff current, which compelled hard pulling. He *couldn't* talk; it was hopeless to keep up this terrible farce of indifference. Evelyn also was glad to pull; she needed something to drive from her mind the recollection of that last happy day when she and Lesley paddled carelessly in this very boat.

At some distance from the houseboat they overtook Betterton and Olga sauntering along the towpath. They spoke, and Evelyn replied, but Lesley could say nothing, for the mad, jealous fury in his heart.

CHAPTER XV.

THE ROBBERY.

THE next morning, at breakfast, Lesley pushed aside his plate untouched, as if the very sight of food was revolting. The Right Hon., lifting his eye, cast a penetrating glance at his son, and observed—

"You look particularly miserable this morning, Lesley."

"I am intensely wretched, sir."

"Have you made an unpleasant discovery?" asked the father, taking a lump of sugar.

Lesley nodded, and, turning his chair from the table, replied briefly, "Yes."

"I thought so. Your spirits were so remarkably good yesterday morning. Do you feel disposed to tell me the nature of your discovery?"

"The discovery is that I have no control over my feelings."

"I presume you are not so morally prostrate—the butter, if you please—that you would suffer your feelings or passions to overcome all sense of right and honor?"

"No, sir; and, for that reason, I cannot engage myself to marry Evelyn—even if she would have me—as I intended."

"I perceive. You find yourself still under the infatuation of Miss Zassoulitch."

"Yes, and, that being the case, I must give up all thought of marriage. I am quite unworthy of such affection as Evelyn's."

"She is a most excellent young lady, and while this"—he sipped his tea—"attack lasts, it would not be right to marry. But it will not last any more than if the derangement were of a purely physical kind."

"I should be sorry to think that it is purely physical," Lesley objected.

"I am glad to hear you say so ; it is more amenable to reason."

"Possibly."

"Certainly." The Right Hon. here spoke with emphasis. "When reason shows that there is nothing of a moral character to admire, admiration must cease."

Lesley toyed with a knife on the table, looking blankly out of the window.

"Therefore," continued the Right Hon., after refilling his cup, I see no reason for giving way to such abject dejection. It is very unfortunate, but an attack of measles, say, at your age, would be more dangerous. In all cases of misfortune we must be patient, and wait. We must take time. Your infatuation will be overcome, your healthy tone will return, and then you will find yourself as worthy of Evelyn Caldecott as she is worthy of you."

"You are supposing that the infatuation is to be overcome."

"Certainly it is. When you find that you cannot introduce Miss Zassoulitch in honorable society"——

"Such a discovery is very remote, sir," said Lesley, interrupting his father hotly.

"I am not so sure of that as you seem to be. I have received a great deal of information about these people—not absolutely reliable, I admit, but too serious to be disregarded. I refrain from entering into particulars, because you are not in a condition to examine them impartially. But a few months, at the outside, will decide the question one way or the other. Does that seem too long to wait?"

"A great deal, sir, in my present condition," answered Lesley, rising impatiently.

"Then I can tell you how to shorten it and improve your condition at the same time. Take another journey, a longer one this time. Go to Moscow. I can furnish you with letters of introduction. You yourself can find means to see the Princess Radozski. If all that the Zassoulitchs say is reliable, the princess will be glad to welcome a friend of theirs. If these people give Olga Zassoulitch a high character, you can come home, marry her, and advise *me* for the future ; if not——." He also rose, leaving the context to Lesley's imagination.

"Was it possible that Olga could be an impostor?" Lesley asked himself. Could fraud and dissimulation

wear such nobility as that which stamped the features of the blind old warrior, Ivan Zassoulitch?

At that very moment the blind old warrior was receiving the finishing touches to his toilet from his man, Parker, and giving him a few last words of advice.

"You will open the safe yourself, Parker?" he murmured.

"Yes. Mrs. Parker don't understand safes. I do."

"Where is Mrs. Parker now?"

"Down in one of the outhouses with the dog."

"Is she going to kill him?"

"No, prince. That is another thing she don't understand. I'm going down as soon as I've finished the prince."

"Where are the servants?"

"Most of 'em engaged below. Breakfast is on."

"You have settled how you will dispose of the *things* when you get them?"

"Oh, that's all right. The prince needn't be anxious about them."

"You will have to be careful—very careful, Parker. You are aware that, in case of discovery, servants are always suspected—and searched?"

"We know all about that, prince. The optician's man is going to bring home the prince's *pince-nez* at half-past seven."

"I comprehend. And you will not take the things before he comes?"

"Not much before. We shall wait till dinner is served."

"You have arranged it all very admirably so far as your part of the business is concerned," said Zassoulitch.

"Now, Parker, you can leave me and settle the dog. I will wait here till you come back. Give me the cigarettes."

Parker led the old man to a chair with a smile of satisfaction at his helplessness. Zassoulitch had been growing more and more feeble and uncertain in his movements lately—placed cigarettes and vestas to his hand on the table besides the chair, and left him comfortably smoking. Zassoulitch mentally counted twenty slowly; then he took the cigarette from his lips and listened intently while he counted a hundred at the same deliberate pace. Then he said softly, "Parker!" and, receiving no answer rose, laid his cigarette on the table, and walked to the

door. If any one had been there, he would have been told that Parker had gone downstairs.

He felt his way along the corridor till he came to the carved head at the top of the landing. He paused again, and called "Parker!" in the tone of one who had strayed and lost his way. No one answered: the only sound was a distant buzz of voices below, broken occasionally by a laugh.

Now, counting his paces, and keeping his hands upon the wall, he penetrated the further corridor. He felt a door; eight paces, from that he came to another. Here he again called "Parker!" and, getting no response, pushed open the door and entered the major's bedroom. "Is any one here? I have lost my way," he said, pausing.

Reassured by the complete silence he crossed with unerring steps to the door of the room in which the safe stood.

"Parker!" he said again in that helpless tone. No answer.

He crossed to the safe almost in a direct line—so conclusively had the impression of its position been fixed in his mind. For a moment he clasped it and retouched it with his nervous fingers, like a person recovering a lost child; then, quick as thought, he dropped down on his knees and slipped his long, thin fingers underneath. There was the button left in its inactive position, parallel with the door; he turned it to a right angle, and, with a few quick touches, assured himself that it was true. Then he rose with the agility of youth, and slowly retraced his steps across the two rooms into the corridor and the room he had left, pausing every now and then to call Parker, or to repeat the same phrase, "I have lost my way; is any one here?" So slowly and doubtfully was this progress made that had any one seen him at any moment—save that when he dropped down to set the electric alarm on the safe—his object and purpose would not have been suspected. Once more in his room he seated himself, and relit his cigarette.

"No, Parker," he said, wagging his head as he lay back in his chair. "You won't bolt with the plunder. Mrs. Parker must learn to respect old age, and the wisdom that grows out of long experience."

"You've been a long while, Parker," he said, when his man returned.

"Not so very long, prince, considering," replied Parker, in a low voice, as he came to his master's side, after closing the door.

"Is it done?" asked Zassoulitch.

"Yes; the dog's at the bottom of the river with a stone round his neck."

Zassoulitch kept Parker close at his heels all day, lest he should be tempted, by a favorable occasion, to take the diamonds before the moment fixed on. Mrs. Parker, being less occupied, walked about her mistress's room like a caged beast before feeding time.

"On this happy occasion, my dear Mrs. Caldecott," said Zassoulitch, in his most courteous tones, when he was walking beside his hostess after lunch—"on this occasion I cannot deny myself the pleasure of sitting with your guests this evening at the same table."

"That's the handsomest compliment that has been paid me to-day," said Mrs. Caldecott, and she ordered that the seat on her right hand should be reserved for the prince.

"Does the prince want me to wait upon him at table?" asked Parker, in a tone of chagrin, when he found an opportunity of speaking to his master privately.

"No; my granddaughter will attend to my wants. You will leave me as soon as the soup is served. I will tell you at the right moment."

Dinner was served at seven sharp. The long table was crowded. The major was radiant.

"You can go, Parker," said Zassoulitch, and turning to his hostess he added, "I wish to hear only your voice and my granddaughter's, and forget that I am blind."

The old man had quite a great deal to say, and turned a neat answer to every question, with an observation profound or epigrammatic to give the conversation a proper amount of light and shade. Nevertheless, his thoughts were following Parker, and his ear was strained to catch the first jingle of the alarm.

The major had just let off his favorite witticism, and the laugh he led was still rippling round the table, when Zassoulitch started to his feet with raised finger, and cried—

"Major Caldecott, do you hear that?"

His commanding figure and attitude, his strident tone

stilled every voice in an instant ; then, plainly enough, the sound of the alarm was heard jingling from the wall behind a picture.

"Ling a-ling a-ling a-ling a-ling a-ling a-ling," the bell sounded, and every one sat as if petrified in wondering astonishment.

"Excuse me," gasped the major, rising from his seat ; and, leaving the room quickly, his step was heard running along the passage.

"Ling a-ling a-ling a-ling a-ling a-ling," the bell continued.

"What is it?" asked a dozen hushed voices.

"Some one has broken open our host's safe: the safe where his diamonds are kept," said Zassoulitch, in his tone of military authority. "Lock the outer doors ; let no one leave the house."

There was a cry of terror on the part of the women ; the men rushed off to render assistance to the major.

"Oh, it must be a mistake," cried Mrs. Caldecott, ever ready to find a bright side to the worst of disasters. "That bell's always ringing for nothing. I do wish, that Mr. David McAllister had not induced my husband to put it up."

"So will Mr. David McAllister," said Zassoulitch to himself.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE DIAMOND CHANGES HANDS.

OUTSIDE the dining-room two or three servants were occupied at a sideboard with the service for the next course. The major dashed past them and upstairs. There was not a soul visible upon the stairs, the landing or in the corridor. The bell was still jingling as he passed through his bedroom. On the threshold of the open door he stood for a moment aghast. The door of his safe was wide open ; the box in which the diamonds were kept lay on the floor end upwards, showing the compartment within—empty.

Instinctively he whipped the revolver from the wall,

and looked round with the fierce hope of finding the enemy still there. The room was empty. He strode into the adjoining bedroom and made a hasty search; then hearing a movement in the corridor, he sprang to the door, to find only his guests, trooping up with expectancy in their faces.

"They are gone—my diamonds—my fortune! I'm ruined!" exclaimed the major, in a tone rendered more piteous by contrast with his ordinary sturdy fortitude. "Ruined!" he added in despair, as he looked round the empty bedroom and sank in a chair, overcome by the sense of his loss.

"My dear major!" said the Right Hon., in a voice of expostulation.

"My wife—Evelyn—it's their fortune—all I had to give them—gone!"

"It cannot be gone; there has not been time for the thief to escape. Before he could have got down the grand stairs you were upon them."

"But the servants' staircase?"

"Lesley is guarding that; he charged himself with that the moment the danger was known."

"Then the thief is still in the house," cried the major, springing to his feet.

"Undoubtedly."

At that moment one of the men who had gone into the inner room cried out that all the diamonds were not stolen; he had put his foot on one in crossing to the empty safe.

Then it became evident as a second, third, and fourth diamond was found by the party now eagerly exploring the floor, that the thief, alarmed by the bell in the next room, had dropped the box in his fear of apprehension. The Right Hon. was the only man who did not bend his knee in the search.

"How many stones were there?" he asked.

"Twenty-one and the large one."

"Has the large one been found?"

"Not yet."

The Right Hon. went down to Lesley, who, with Betterton, was guarding the foot of the servant's staircase, and sent him off to find the local policeman, himself staying to keep Lord George company.

Presently Mrs. Parker came down and would have passed by, but the Right Hon. stopped her.

"I must trouble you to go upstairs for a little while," he said with firm civility; "for the present no one can be allowed to circulate in the house."

Mrs. Parker, with her lips and thin nostrils more tightly compressed than ever, replied by a stiff bow, and returned the way she came.

"That woman or her husband will try the other staircase," said the Right Hon. to his companion: "If you know your way through the kitchen, go and stop her. You know her husband, the Russian's attendant?"

Betterton started off with the delight of a reserve ordered into action, and reached the foot of the grand staircase just in time to meet Mrs. Parker coming briskly down.

"I must trouble you to go upstairs again," he said, in the Right Hon.'s measured tones; "for the present no one can be allowed to circulate in the house."

If Mrs. Parker could have knocked him down with a glance, Lord George would certainly have been floored. But the vindictive look in her eyes only served to sharpen his wits, and he glanced up quickly, and had the satisfaction of catching a glimpse of Parker looking down from the landing above.

"By Jupiter! they're in it," he said to himself; and anxious to impart his conviction to the Right Hon., he beckoned the gentleman posted at the outer door, communicated his belief, and, with strong injunctions to him to let neither Parker nor his wife pass, left him to guard the stairs, and returned to the Right Hon.

"We may discover shortly why she was so anxious to pass the barrier," said the Right Hon. when he had heard Betterton's information. They had not long to wait.

About ten minutes later there was a ring at the servants' bell.

"That is Lesley with the policeman. I will let him in. Stay here," said the Right Hon.

He opened the door. An elderly man in an Inverness cape stood outside.

"I've come from Mr. Evans, of Reading, with Prince Zassoulitch's glasses," he said, presenting a small parcel; "there's half a crown to pay."

"I dare say you wish to see the Prince's man, Mr. Parker. Come in and wait until he is disengaged."

Servants wear tail coats and white ties, so it was not

the Right Hon.'s evening dress which alarmed the man; it was his voice and delivery that betrayed the minister.

With a hasty excuse, the man quietly but quickly withdrew.

Had the Right Hon. felt himself as strong physically as he was mentally, he would have seized that man and compelled him to wait till Lesley returned with the policeman, but like most intellectual men he dreaded personal encounter, and suffered the confederate to escape. Lesley returned with the constable five minutes too late.

Meanwhile, the search upstairs went along merrily. The ladies helped, the excitement growing as another diamond was discovered, a chorus of joyful cries announcing each fresh find. At last, when a systematic investigation of every nook and corner had been made, it was announced that twenty-one diamonds had been recovered—the complete set except one. That one, unfortunately, happened to be the great crystal, worth double all the rest. Then it became evident that the thief had secured that, and possibly scattered the remainder purposely to gain time for escape. During this time, some of the gentlemen with the intelligent constable had closely examined every hiding-place in the house, from cock-loft to cellar, with a view to capturing the thief. The result was fruitless. Only the faintest hope existed of its being otherwise; for the false key left in the lock of the safe was to most persons conclusive evidence that the robbery had been committed by some one residing in the house who had found means to take an impression of the lock.

Zassoulitch and Olga alone remained in the dining-room, when the ladies, overcoming their dread of robbers, had gone upstairs to satisfy their curiosity. Both were quite silent. At the first announcement of the theft, Olga's heart had almost ceased to beat as the terrible suspicion flashed upon her mind that her grandfather was concerned in it. That he was seated at the table when the alarm was rung, and that he himself indicated the precautions to be taken to prevent the thief's escape, rather strengthened than diminished her apprehensions. She knew him.

"Grandfather," she asked, murmuring low and in Russian, "who has done this?"

"Don't ask foolish questions," he replied, in the same tongue. "Remember your father's folly cost us a fortune

and sent us to Siberia. Be wiser or prepare for worse."

Presently he told her to take him to his room. At the foot of the stairs, the young fellow left to guard them—he had arrived late and barely seen either Zassoulitch or Olga, said—

"Very unfortunate affair."

"Indeed, indeed," Olga replied.

She would have passed on, feeling at that moment that all must see in her face evidence of her grandfather's guilt, but her grandfather detained her.

"Has the thief been found yet?" he asked.

"Not yet," The young fellow, big with the importance of exclusive knowledge, lowered his voice to a confidential manner as he added. "But they're not far off. Servants as usual; a couple. One tried to slip downstairs just now. A woman about thirty with a hatchet face; perhaps you know her?"

Olga shook her head, sickening with the conviction that Mrs. Parker, her own servant, was indicated.

"Lord Betterton just hurried round in time to stop her here, after turning her back at the other staircase. And, what is more conclusive, he caught sight of her husband looking down to see if she had managed to run the blockade."

"Infamous wretches!" exclaimed Zassoulitch. "I hope they will be searched."

Olga left the old man at his door, and forced herself to join a knot of ladies near the landing.

"Bungler!" muttered Zassoulitch, as Parker closed the room door and took his arm to lead him to a seat. "Were not you told that an alarm was fitted on? Had not you the sense to cut the wires?"

"There were none to cut. I looked for 'em."

"You are as big a fool as your wife. That's a good deal to say of you, too. You know that she is suspected already of trying to dodge Lord Betterton—first on one flight of stairs, then on the other?"

"Ah, he knows that."

"He—everybody knows it. And you were seen too. A pretty pair to be entrusted with such a delicate business as this.

"Curse her. I said she'd ruin us."

"That's why you gave her the thing to take care of."

"I've got it back though," Parker muttered, between his teeth.

"Thinking you could succeed when she failed. Ugh ! shut that window, Parker. It's too high to drop ; the major never misses when he aims ; and you couldn't cross the river without being seen."

Parker looked askant at the old man, who had rightly divined the very reflections that occurred to him as he gauged the possibility of escape only a few minutes before.

"I know you do not wish to let the thing go out of your hand," the old man continued, in a low, muttering tone which rendered his speech perfectly unintelligible beyond a few yards. "Though it is safer, so far as that other party is concerned, in my hands than it is in yours, as you know ; but you will have to give it me. In a very short time you will be searched. The thing is too big to swallow. If it is found on you, nothing can save you. You will be ruined for life. Keep it till the last moment ; but when the last moment comes, pass it on to me."

"Ah, well, it's gone, and there's an end of it," exclaimed the major, in a tone of cheerful resignation when the search came to an end.

"Precisely my way of looking at it, dear," said Mrs. Caldecott, with her little fat laugh. "There's an end of it, and now we can begin again as if the incident had not occurred. I only hope," she added, turning to her guests, "that the thief has not taken away your appetites as well as our property. Come, let us take a little turn in the garden while the servants rearrange the table. You'll see about that, Harry : won't you ?"

The major promised, and would gladly have carried out the idea, but, as the ladies left, the Right Hon. took his arm and said, quietly—

"Not yet, major."

"My dear sir, haven't we searched every corner of the room? What else can we do ?"

"Examine the servants. There is strong reason to believe that one of them has the lost diamond."

The major laughed derisively.

"Why, my servants," he began—

The Right Hon. interrupted—

"I do not say whose servant is to be suspected ; but,

in justice to the innocent, you must take what means are possible for discovering which is guilty."

There were not two opinions amongst his friends as to the advisability of this course.

"Well, gentlemen," said the major, ruefully, "if it's the unanimous wish it shall be done; but how it's to be done, I don't, for the life of me, see."

"We will go down into the library," suggested the Right Hon. "The constable need not be introduced until he is wanted. Send for every servant in the house. Tell them your diamond is gone, no sign of any burglar to be found, and ask them if they would like to prove themselves innocent of the theft by voluntarily submitting to be searched. Not one will object to prove his innocence. The objection will come from the thief, and that one must be searched on compulsion."

"Well, if it must be"—the major lifted his eyebrows and passed his fingers up through his hair. "Hang me if I should like it were I a servant. Better get it over at once, eh?"

Soon after this there was a rap at the door of Zassoulitch's room.

"Open the door, Parker," said Zassoulitch, and as the man passed him he murmured, "they have come for you."

The Right Hon. and Lord George Betterton entered the room. It seemed to Parker that Ivan Zassoulitch had supernatural power.

In a few words the Right Hon. told Zassoulitch the result of the search, and then said—

"I am instructed by Major Caldecott to ask if you will permit your servant to go down into the library for a few minutes."

"Certainly I will. Parker, follow the gentlemen downstairs."

"Would you like to come down?" Betterton asked.

"Thank you, no. But if you will be good enough to send my granddaughter to me, I shall thank you; and, Parker, before you go, give me my silk handkerchief. I think I left it in the next room."

Parker fetched the handkerchief from the next room and presented it to his master; then, with a respectful bow, he turned and followed the Right Hon. and Lord George.

Ivan Zassoulitch passed the silk handkerchief over his

face carefully, as though a dozen watching eyes were upon him, and rested his elbow on the arm of the chair, the soft handkerchief in the palm of his hand against his mouth.

"I knew you would come to me," he whispered, rapturously. "I knew that so much patient love and thought could not be unrewarded. And you have come to me, my treasure, my heart's delight," and he kissed the big diamond through the folds of the silk handkerchief in which Parker had deposited it.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE SEARCH.

PARKER was the last servant to enter the library. The major sat at his writing-table with the gentlemen on each side of him at the lower end. The servants stood opposite at the upper end—the men on one side; the women on the other. He and his wife exchanged glances, necessarily rapid and in consequence unintelligible. Mrs. Parker's face was cadaverous, rigid, and death-like as a wax mask.

The major rose as Dunbar and Betterton came to his side, and with as much firmness as his dislike to the proceeding allowed, explained the position of affairs, and called upon them to submit to a voluntary examination.

"Now you know," he said in conclusion, "I don't suppose any of you will object, but in case there may be any question upon that point, I think we had better have a show of hands. Now, all those——"

"Allow me to ask one question, Mr. Caldecott," said Mrs. Parker, stepping forward; "what right have you to examine us?"

"Without a search warrant I have possibly no right at all; but——"

"Pardon me for interrupting," said the Right Hon., rising. "The offer is made," he added, addressing Mrs. Parker, "that you may have the opportunity of proving your innocence without official inquiry."

"What right have you to suppose that we are guilty?" asked Mrs. Parker, sharply.

"We don't suppose it," said the major.

"Excuse me, sir, contradicting, but you do. From the first we have been confined to one part of the house for that reason. And I ask again, why we are suspected?"

The Major glanced uneasily at the Right Hon., who at once replied—

"Suspicion must necessarily fall upon you in the absence of any other possible thief."

"That is not true, sir. Supposing one of your servants, Mr. Caldecott, or one of your visitor's servants, found means to open your safe, it does not follow that the diamond has been taken by us. Every lady and gentleman in the house has been engaged in looking for the stones—everybody except the servants. How do you know whether the great diamond Mr. Caldecott speaks of has been found or not—whether it has not been picked up and secreted by one of you? You may smile, but such a thing is not impossible. There are dishonest masters as well as dishonest servants. I have nothing to fear, or I shouldn't be fool enough to open my mouth; but I speak in behalf of my fellow servants, who may not feel so free. The loss of character means ruin to us; and which of you gentlemen would engage a servant who had to confess he'd been examined on suspicion of theft? For my part I object to being searched, and I advise all the rest to do as I do."

With a slight jerk of the head she drew back.

"Well, what is the general opinion?" asked the major in helpless perplexity.

The terrible searching eye of the Right Hon. was upon Parker, who, taking his regard as a challenge, replied—

"I should like to say, gentlemen, that I don't see the matter in the same light as my wife does. I have no objection to being searched."

The Right Hon. was now morally convinced that Zasloulitch was a confederate, and that Parker had passed the diamond on to him. He had observed a look of vexation in the man's face as his wife, probably believing that the plunder was in his possession, had raised an objection to the search which would have cleared them and put an end to further investigation.

"Now how about the rest of you?" asked the major, appealing to all.

"I beg your pardon, Mr. Caldecott, but I should like to

say a few words," said the gardener—a shining light in the village club, and proud of his gifts. "What Mrs. Parker has said is to the pint and purpose. Loss of character is ruin to the servants, who are not in the same position as masters."

The Right Hon. smiled, and the gardener encouraged to speak plain truths went on.

"You have said, sir, that the lost property represents a large part of your fortune, consequently having lost it, we may expect you to reduce your establishment, and your servants seeking new places must state the reason why and admit to having been under this here suspicion, but, as Mrs. Parker has hinted out, masters can be dishonest as well as servants, and this here new disease, klepto—something or other—seems to be mighty prevalent among the higher classes; therefore, sir, if a search is to be made I think it ought in fairness to include masters as well as servants, and seeing that most of the gentlemen present have been handling diamonds for the last hour, while we've been kept as, I may say, prisoners, I do humbly suggest that the gentlemen be searched fust. After which I don't see as we can have any objection to undergoing a similar operation. Excuse me, gentlemen, for being so straight-forrard."

"Perfectly just, perfectly logical," said the Right Honorable in a low tone.

"Nonsense!" the major exclaimed; "it's simply the *reductio ad absurdum* of reasoning."

"Treat it as a jest by all means—" said the Right Hon. dropping his voice, it is the very best means of escape from a position which might otherwise appear ignominious; but accede to the proposal at once."

"Never!" exclaimed the major, sturdily, as he rose from his chair and turned from the table. "D—it all, do you think this fustian of equality will lead me to outrage the laws of hospitality and offer insults to the guests under my roof? No—not for all the diamonds in existence."

"But if the majority of your friends desire—if they do more than that—insist on this examination?"

"They will do nothing of the sort if they have any sense in their heads."

"That remains to be seen. Gentlemen," continued the Right Hon., still in the same unemotional, low voice, addressing the knot of men who had followed him and the

major through the open window on to the terrace, "I am not one to make a grave charge lightly. I tell you, with a firm conviction which nothing can shake, that the lost diamond will be found, not upon any of the servants, but on one of the guests. I make this charge openly; your common honor compels you to demand a complete and immediate investigation."

An unanimous consent was given by the murmuring voices of those who heard him.

"I will have nothing to do with it," said the major, plunging his hands in his pockets.

"That is advisable. With your permission, I will take the whole responsibility of this course upon myself."

At this moment Zassoulitch and his granddaughter came into sight. The old man walked with his customary slow, military gait, his shoulders thrown back, his head erect. One hand was thrust in the breast of his closely buttoned frock; the other rested on Olga's arm. He was speaking, and that enabled Olga to bend her head in a listening attitude. She felt that the color had gone from her lips, and that her face was deadly white. Horror of her present position, terror of something worse yet to come seemed to freeze the blood in her veins.

"At least you will spare that old man this ordeal," the major said, quickly, as, raising his head, his eyes fell on what was to him a touching picture of nobility and innocence. "He was at the table when the alarm rang. He has not been near the room. He is blind!"

"Yes, that may be; but his servants are not blind," the Right Hon. objected.

The Right Honorable stepped forward to meet Zassoulitch, and, as briefly as possible, told him what the majority of guests had decided upon. Only Olga cowered; the old man listened with inflexible calmness.

"Am I to understand that you are serious?" he asked when the Right Honorable ceased to speak.

"Quite."

"You are not my host. Where is he?"

"Here," said the major who had followed quickly, "and I cannot tell you how deeply grieved——"

"A soldier and a man of honor should have nothing to regret. Is it with your sanction that this shame is put upon your guests?"

"I alone am responsible for a course taken on behalf of those who also are guests," said the Right Honorable.

"Major Caldecott is fortunate in finding one worthy of such a base office. Is it your custom, gentlemen, to put yourselves in the position of suspected thieves—to prove your honesty by shameful degradation? I could not have believed it. I have been searched by the police of Moscow; then the safety of an emperor's life was the excuse; and you have cried shame upon the Government that permits it. Here you scarcely offer an excuse, when a bauble is lost, to submit your friends to such indignity."

"Of course you are not obliged—" the Right Honorable began.

"Stop, sir!" Zassoulitch exclaimed, throwing up his left hand, at the same time drawing the other from his breast pocket, and clutching Olga's hand with passionate anger in his face. "I will not give you that pretext to slander me when I am gone. I know you. I read your character long ago. You have said to your son, 'Beware of that Russian and his grand-daughter. We know nothing about them. Go away for a few weeks, lest you fall a victim to their snares.' You have said this; deny it if you can. And you, who would blot the character of this innocent child upon the strength of a canard—a report whispered behind the back of a hand in the corner of an embassy—have doubtless jumped eagerly at this opportunity of putting us to public shame for the better protection of your son. You have succeeded, but you shall not get your full measure of success. I will not leave it open for you to say to-morrow or to-night, 'Ah, that old man got off cheaply; if we had only stripped him to the skin we should have found the diamond.' You *shall* strip me to the skin. The only mercy I will ask, in consideration of my age, is that I am kept here no longer for the compassionate to pity. If any one will do me a service," he added, turning his head slowly as if to face a friend, "I ask him to fetch a carriage, that I may take my grandchild away as soon as this shameful business is done."

"I will do that," Lesley said.

"Thank you, Mr. Lesley," said Zassoulitch, with a bow. Then turning towards the Right Hon., he said, "I am waiting for you to strip me, Mr. Dunbar."

The Right Hon., although considerably staggered by the unexpected and direct blow dealt by Zassoulitch, still stuck to his conviction, and at once led the old man into

the smoking room that adjoined the library. Then he called the constable.

"This gentleman desires to be searched," he said, and withdrew.

The major, more indignant and more unhappy than he had ever been in his life, attacked him the moment he stepped out upon the terrace.

"Mr. Dunbar," he said, in a voice shaken with conflicting emotions, "you have done me a great wrong."

"You allude——" the Right Hon. began, in his cold, formal tone.

"Oh, I'm not alluding to anything Zassoulitch said about you——"

"Everything that he said," observed the complacent Right Hon., "was perfectly true. Allowing for exaggeration, he divined no more than was actually true."

"It isn't that. You have taken advantage of the weakness in my character to push this inquiry beyond the limits of decency and honor."

"Wait until you hear the result of this examination."

"It does not affect my conscience whether Zassoulitch is guilty or not guilty. In either case, you have done me an irreparable injury. You have made me, for the first time in my life, ashamed of myself, and, however this matter ends, I beg you, sir, to consider me no longer your friend."

The Right Hon. accepted this with a stiff bow, and turned away, painfully conscious that his zeal to free Lesley from the toils of a designing adventuress had placed him in a very awkward position. Nothing could justify him except success. And, just then, the constable came from the smoking room to inform him that a complete search had ended in his finding nothing in the shape of a diamond upon the person of Zassoulitch. Lesley returned, bringing a fly.

Zassoulitch, coming from the room, seemingly broken down by the humiliation he had been subjected to, asked in a trembling voice—

"Where is my granddaughter?"

Olga, who had sat apart, refusing to accept consolation or sympathy from any one—her hands folded in her lap, her head bent, her whole aspect the embodiment of humiliation rose and joined him.

"Am I free to go?" he asked, raising his voice, and, by a movement, seeming to shake off his humility.

"You are free," the Right Hon. answered.

"Then come my child," said Zassoulitch.

The men made way and bowed in silence as Zassoulitch, taking Olga's hand, moved forward.

"Unless," he added, stopping, with grand audacity, in a voice of fierce wrath, "unless it is your custom to submit young women as well as old men to the hands of your police."

At that very moment Olga had the diamond in her hand!

CHAPTER XVIII

ESCAPE.

ZASSOULITCH had passed the diamond to Olga at the moment when he threw up his left hand to check the Right Hon., and, shifting his position, took Olga's hand with the other, which had hitherto reposed in his breast. The upward movement of the left hand was abrupt and swift; the right dropped slowly, as if with the instinctive object of finding support. The movement was perfectly natural, corresponding, as it did, with passionate rebuke; but a practical conjuror would have detected it at once as the means invariably employed to divert attention from a delicate manipulation.

Olga felt something hard and smooth, about the size of a thrush's egg, pressed into the palm of her hand, and knew that it was the stolen diamond. From the very first she had suspected that her grandfather was concerned in the robbery; he himself, preparing for foreseen difficulties, had left her hardly room for doubt. The faint hope of a misguiding fear was extinguished now. He was the thief, and she his accomplice.

What was she to do? To expose her grandfather's crime; to acknowledge the imposition through which the robbery had been effected; to submit to an inquiry which must reveal the fact that her father and her grandfather were sent to Siberia, not as political exiles, but as convicted felons;

to be thrown a destitute outcast upon the world, if not to share a prison with her grandfather? Her past sufferings, the horror of Siberian prisons, came back to her mind, and forbade her to yield to the whispering solicitation of conscience. She must go on along this course of deception, or fall to still lower depths.

She allowed her grandfather to slowly close her fingers upon the diamond in her hand, and, as he relinquished it, she dropped it in the folds of her dress. She was sick and faint with shame and remorse; for an instant the ground seemed to swim under her feet; voices sounded distant to her ear. In another moment she would have fallen unconscious to the floor; she knew it and with that knowledge came the perception of what must follow: they would raise her, and the diamond would slip from her nerveless fingers, to betray her guilt. That gave her the energy to brace up her supine faculties.

Fortunately for her, the outward signs of this terrible ordeal were not inconsistent with innocence, and might fairly be attributed to a sense of outraged honor. Betterton spoke to her in a few sentences that were creditable to his heart and head. The major implored her to join his wife and the other ladies on the lawn.

She answered both, without raising her head, merely by a negative movement, and walked from thence down the terrace to a seat, where she remained alone until Zassoulitch called her.

They went out to the carriage, Lesley alone accompanying them.

"I hope you will remember me not bitterly always," he said in a low voice as he opened the door.

"Mr. Lesley Dunbar," replied Zassoulitch, "we never forget our friends; we may only try to forget our enemies."

He gave his hand.

"If I can be of any mortal service——" Lesley suggested, encouraged by this.

Thank you; we are going on to our hotel—the Prince's. It will save us some inconvenience if you will tell our servants to follow us with our effects after they have been searched."

Olga, shrinking back in the corner of that carriage, seemed hardly to notice the young man as he stood by the door, yearning for some sign from her.

"Where to sir?" asked the driver.

Lesley looked at his watch ; there was no train from Pangbourne for two hours. He directed the man to drive on to Reading.

As the carriage moved on, Zassoulitch took Olga's hand in silence, unclasped her fingers, and took possession of the diamond. Neither spoke a word.

Zassoulitch caressed the diamond between the palms of his hands, pressed his thin fingers gently over its surface, and then slipping it into his breast, hugged it closely against his heart. The old man felt young again, exultant, jubilant, giddy with delight. He would have liked to talk over the whole affair, and dwell upon all its incidents ; but he knew he could find no sympathy in Olga, and he was not just now in a mood to reason with her, or excite reciprocal feelings in one whose nature he so thoroughly despised. So he sat gloating over his success in silence.

When his excitement abated, he indulged in speculations concerning the future, and then, by degrees, brought his thoughts to practical consideration of questions that demanded immediate solution.

He had not the slightest notion of giving up any portion of his treasure to the Parkers. They had bungled, and deserved the punishment of failure. He intended to do by them just as they would have done by him had they been successful : he would have nothing more to do with them. But they might be troublesome.

Happily, he had got a good start of them. With all the expedition possible, they could not catch the train from Pangbourne, which he knew quite as well as Lesley started from Pangbourne in about two hours. And here he chuckled over the mental picture of all those visitors passing through the policeman's investigation, waiting like a flock of sheep for their turn to be searched.

How would they manage when they came to the female servants ? A female searcher would have to be found. Oh, poor Mrs. Parker !

Well, they would get through the business at some time, and then the Parkers would have to collect their property, pack it, and get it over to the station—not much before midnight, probably. There was no fear of their telling tales ; and certainly they would go on, when it was possible, to Prince's Hotel, buoyed up with the faint hope of finding him there, and persuading him to be generous.

But of course, they would not find him at the Prince's; that was the last place in the world he would go to. He should prefer Victoria, or even Whitechapel, for a refuge. A good hotel at Victoria would do.

But suddenly the old man realized that the most comprehensive genius may overlook trifles. And one contingency he certainly had omitted to provide for. To get to Victoria railway tickets were necessary—railway tickets were not to be had without money, and not a penny had he in his pockets. It was a peculiar fact; he had twenty thousand pounds in his breast, but not the means to carry him third-class to Paddington.

How about pawnbrokers? Would there be any establishment of that kind open when they reached Reading? If not, could anyone be found to lend a trifle upon his trinkets? He reckoned up the probable amounts she required. Fares to London, a pound; hotel expenses for the night, with breakfast, another pound; single fare to Hamburg to-morrow morning, early, two pounds more. Five pounds was all he needed; and anyone might have his watch, chain, rings, studs—everything for that. Once in Hamburg he could get as much as he wanted. His old friend, Zimmerman, was not a man to cut off his nose to spite his face, and though he might be on the best of terms with McAllister and that lot, he wouldn't let friendship stand in the way when a big diamond was to be bought, a bargain. Yes—five pounds—one little flimsy piece of paper would meet all his present requirements.

In these calculations the entirely selfish old man left Olga out of the question beyond breakfast next morning. He had no intention of taking her. She was not a bit of good to him now. It had been difficult enough to manage her up to this point, but she had been useful to him. He knew she had been writing secretly with some idiotic idea of making an independent living *honestly*: well, if in the midst of pleasure and luxury she had such notions, it was clear that the mania was too inherent to be eradicated. If she wanted to be honest she had better not live with him, that was evident. She might write her book; and if she *did* make a fortune by it, perhaps he would overlook the weakness in her character, and look her up again.

But how was this five pounds to be got? Perhaps the driver—no, it was not likely he would have so much, and *anything* less wouldn't do. The station master might

be bounced ; or, perhaps, as audacity always pays, it would be better to go straight to the police station and bounce the inspector ; or find out a J. P., that might be best of all. Still, all that meant delay, and time was precious—terribly precious.

As these matters passed through his mind his fine ear became conscious of a sound, steady, persistent, and gradually growing in distinctness, other than the whirr of the wheels, the thud of the horses' feet, and the jingle of the harness.

"Olga," he said, presently, with conviction "we are being followed. There's a horse without a carriage gaining upon us. Look out carefully, not as if you were afraid, and see if it is one of the police."

"Olga changed her seat. Shortly a bend in the road enabled her to see the persevering horseman, now within twenty yards of the carriage. Faint as the light was she recognized by the square shoulders and set of his head that it was Lesley Dunbar.

Zassoulitch patted his knee gleefully when he heard this. There would be no difficulty in getting away now ; and it was delightful to think that the very person to assist him in escaping was the son of the man who had tried his utmost to convict him of the theft. Clearly Olga was still of some use.

"If I were mean enough to indulge the sentiment of revenge," he said to himself, "I should be tempted to stay in England and bring about the marriage of these two young people. What a triumph to inform this clever, conceited statesman that his only son was tied for life to the daughter of a Jew thief."

The idea opened a new train of speculations, which he was allowed to follow with uninterrupted, for Lesley, having overtaken the carriage, was content to follow it without introducing himself until it drew up in front of the station at Reading, when he threw himself from the saddle and stepped forward to open the door.

"I have followed in the hope that you would permit me to offer my services," he said.

"Is that Mr. Lesley Dunbar?" asked Zassoulitch, in a tone of astonishment.

"You encouraged me to believe that I might take the privilege of a friend," Lesley continued.

"Your friendship is most acceptable at all times, Mr. Lesley. We must forgive, even if we cannot forget, your

father's unfortunate error in judgment—certainly it is not in our nature to visit the sins of one upon another. And, if you please, we will never again refer to that affair. At the present moment your help is particularly timely, for without it, we should have been compelled to stay here until our servants came to us. My grandchild, as you see, is quite distraught—upset by the events of this evening”—the old man was irritated by Olga's absolute silence—“and apart from the difficulty of travelling, owing to our inexperience in doing anything for ourselves in that way, a very serious difficulty occurred to me a moment since, when I felt for my purse to pay the driver of this fly,—in the hurry of departure I have left my money behind with the rest of our effects. I was just telling Olga that we must telegraph to the Parkers, telling them not to go on to the Prince's; wasn't I, dear?”

Olga made no response.

“That reminds me,” said Lesley, as they entered the station; “I omitted to deliver your message. I will send a message by the driver—the post is closed.”

“It is unnecessary,” said Zassoulitch. “Olga tells me that as she passed through the library, on her way to get her bonnet, she arranged with Mrs. Parker to follow us there.”

Of course, this was a pure fabrication; but it occurred to the old man that, as Lesley had not delivered the message, the Prince's would after all be the safest place to go to, as the Parkers would never give them credit for such audacity.

Lesley took tickets for Paddington feverish with excitement, his passion for Olga rekindled by the prospect of travelling with her, of thinking about her without restriction. A sense of freedom, of liberty, to follow the inclinations of his heart filled him with choking joy.

After putting Olga and her grandfather in the carriage he had been met in the hall by Evelyn. She too, was white with strong emotion; but she was calm and firm, with a fixed resolution to do what was right in her belief.

“They are gone?” she asked.

“Yes,” Lesley replied.

“Then you must go, too, Lesley,” she said. “She needs you. It is your duty to go, for her sake, for yours, and mine also. Go, dear Lesley, and”—her voice faltered a little as she pressed his hand and added—*God bless you both.*”

CHAPTER XIX.

LESLEY'S OFFER.

THE train ran into the station ; Lesley found an empty compartment ; the guard locked the door on the entire party, and the next minute they were on their way to London. Zassoulitch was too profoundly grateful for words. Lesley was the first to break silence. Putting a notecase into the hands of Zassoulitch he said—

"You will find sufficient in this for your present needs, I hope."

Zassoulitch bowed unutterable thanks in silence, and then asked if he should find an address within to which he might in due course return it. Lesley gave his card, which the old man received with equally grave acknowledgments. Having carefully placed the card in the notecase and slipped both into his breast pocket, he said—

"Complete the obligation, Mr. Lesley Dunbar, by telling me which is the most agreeable way of crossing to the Continent."

"For Paris, by Dover and Calais ; for the East by Queenborough."

"Queenborough. And the train—the earliest train ?"

"Trains by both routes start from Victoria about eleven, I believe."

"Thank you. Eleven o'clock. Will that be too early for you, Olga ?" he asked, turning his face towards Olga, who sat in the further corner of the carriage.

"No," she replied, apathetically.

"Then by that train we will go."

"You are leaving England so soon !" exclaimed Lesley.

"Do you see any necessity or any inducement to stay, sir ?" asked the old man, bitterly ; and, as Lesley made no response, he continued : "If the charge against us

had not been disproved, it might have been advisable to stay and face inquiry ; but inquiry has been pushed to its last limit, and we are free to study only our own convenience. You are a practical people, and in our brief stay we have learnt from you that the best way to obtain peace of mind is—to leave England."

Lesley took no notice of the personal application to himself that underlay the sarcasm ; he was thinking what England or the world would be without Olga.

"No, there can be no inducement or necessity to stay here," he said, with a sigh and a glance towards Olga, who sat in her corner with hopeless dejection in her face and attitude.

Zassoulitch, having closed the discussion, bent back in dignified repose, with his arms folded on his breast.

When Lesley broke the silence, after a few moments, with an observation, he got no reply. Zassoulitch slept—or wished to sleep.

Lesley changed his seat, taking the corner opposite Olga. She raised her heavy eyes, and looked into his face for an instant with wonder at the earnest warmth and honest candor she found there, and then dropped them with a feeling of humiliation and shame, which she had not the will to conceal. Dissimulation was no longer expedient, even. What good had come of deceit? None. It had given her only a vision of happiness, which made her miserable destiny more hard to meet.

"You are not glad to leave England?" he said, observing only the melancholy in her face.

"No, no," she replied, in a tone of mournful regret ; "I am very, very sorry. I have found many friends, and it gives me great grief to leave them, and in this way."

"If that is your feeling, you must believe that your friends are still more grieved that you should leave them like this. They suffer too."

"Without humiliation?"

"Oh, pardon me: the humiliation is not yours. We have done wrong—not you. You have only to forgive ; we have need to be forgotten. You will come back to them?"

"No, no ; that is all past. It is as if we were dead. To come back is not possible."

"It is possible," he said, with growing animation. "*Evelyn* has made it possible."

"Evelyn!" she exclaimed, in astonishment, as she lifted her eyes. "I do not understand," she added, in perplexity, observing the hopeful confidence in his face.

Eager to repair the injury done by his father, exalted by the belief that he could give happiness to the woman he loved, Lesley, breaking through all forms, leant forward and said, with passionate ardor—

"I love you! Evelyn knows that I love you, and can love none but you, and has sent me here that I may ask you to be my wife. As my wife let me take you back."

A glow spread over Olga's pale cheeks; her eyes sparkled with the tears that sprang into them; her lip trembled, and her expression became exceedingly tender and sweet under the momentary gleam of happiness. It was the response of her heart to Evelyn's generosity, not to Lesley's passion. Emotion silenced her for a moment; when she spoke her voice was hushed, and the words came slowly from her lips.

"She has done this," she said; "oh, it is wonderful, for I know how much she loves you!"

"You would wonder less if you had known her, as I have, from a child."

"If I had known her as you have I should wonder more that you could give her up. What can I give to replace such love as hers? What do you know of me?"

"This," he answered almost fiercely: "that I love you more than all the world. Oh! this passion is not a thing to reason about. It is stronger than one's will—stronger, I can believe, than conscience or any consideration of right and wrong. I have tried to forget you—to cease to love you. You know why I went away: you see the result."

She looked at him as he stretched forth his arms, half kneeling at her feet, white, and shaken with the violence of his passion, and her wonder was mingled with something like contempt, for passion was as yet only a word for her—an unknown sentiment vaguely figured in the girlish dreams that had come to her before the cloud overcast her life.

"If I refuse to be your wife," she asked, slowly, "what will happen?"

"God knows," he answered, desperately. "I know only this—that I can never offer to another, and least of

all to Evelyn, a heart whose only worth is the love which you possess."

"I must think," she said, turning away from him and closing her eyes as she bent her head, striving to shut out all consideration of him in the earnest impulse to do right.

Putting herself in Evelyn's place, what would she do if this man went back to her, rejected by a rival? Would she accept the offer of that emptied purse, his loveless heart? Would she accept for a lord a man who had forsaken her and might again forsake her for the gratification of a momentary caprice—a man who valued passing prettiness above the loyal devotion of a life? Would she forgive a want of steadfastness which could never be forgotten? Would she trust her life-long happiness and her honor to the keeping of a creature so weak that he could not master his own inclination and stand his ground firmly for a few days against the temptation? Would she abandon all hope of larger love, sink her own self respect and stoop to his level by such a union? No, no, a thousand times no?

Lesley, who knew nothing of what was passing in her mind, stole her hand and raised it to his lips.

"Wait," she said, sharply, snatching her fingers away with a feeling of repugnance, and covering her face with her hands. And now having looked at the question from Evelyn's point of view and arrived honestly at the conclusion that Evelyn could not marry him, she allowed herself to consider whether she might accept his offer. That was a very different matter. She had no pride to sink, no larger hope to entertain. She had nothing better to wish for than a marriage to save her from further degradation. In her present position, it meant simply salvation from misery, want, and unknown infamy. The only possible objections were a certain amount of injustice to Lesley and a necessity for further deception. Lesley had told her that his passion was stronger than conscientious considerations. Possibly under the force of this infatuation he would make her his wife, even if she confessed the whole truth. But that, though it would relieve her from the necessity to deceive, was not to be thought of. The happiness of a lifetime was involved—not only her own, but his. He might marry her knowing her antecedents, but his passion would change to *disgust and abhorrence* as soon as he had outlived his

infatuation ; and then if he did not find means to separate, their future must be a continual series of reproach, recrimination, and wretchedness until death freed one or the other from the misery of their own creation.

Why should she not keep up the deception and marry him? The mask had been worn without much inconvenience during the last few months ; it would be still easier—might become almost unnoticeable—with a little more wearing. After all it seemed to her that she would be quite as good a wife as Lesley deserved—indeed, just such a one as a man of that kind would do best to marry. She would not be exacting—would not look too closely into his life away from home—shut her eyes to his flirtations and many weaknesses. For of course he would flirt like most men after marriage. Observation had shown her that the happiest husbands were those whose wives had the tact to manage them and keep them in good temper. She might even get to like him a good deal in time. She figured him a middle-aged man—not at all like his father, but stout, good-looking, fond of good living, and exceedingly pliable under her careful handling. And she would do her utmost to make his life happy. Oh, certainly she would, letting him have his own way when he wanted it, and getting her own without letting it be too evident. She should owe him much—redemption from a life of shifts and terrible possibilities—and she would repay him.

"Speak to me," Lesley implored.

She opened her eyes and raised her head as her hand dropped from her brow. He was leaning forward, one hand resting on the arm of the seat by her side. The light shone upon his soft waving hair, love beautified his naturally handsome features, and his look was wonderfully earnest and kind. It struck her that altogether they would make a very good appearance in society ; then her lips parted, and stripping off her glove she smiled upon him.

He dropped upon his knees with a rapturous exclamation, caught her two hands up, covered them with kisses, and pressed them to his burning face, while Olga was coolly wondering how it was that some women could keep men in this condition of fervid adoration.

"I must learn their secret ; it is power," she said to herself.

"You will be my wife, love?" Lesley asked.

"Have I not given you my hand—is that not enough?"

"No, no—tell me with your lips that you are mine," he answered, releasing her hand and placing his arm upon her supple waist. She put her hands upon his shoulders, holding him away from her and looking into his eyes with a long regard that intoxicated him.

"While we can bring men to our feet like this," Olga said again to herself, "we can make them tools to do what we will. I must keep this power."

"Darling! darling!" murmured Lesley, "speak to me with your lips."

"You would do anything to give me happiness?" she asked.

"Only tell me how I may prove it."

"I am ambitious."

"And I too, when I think that you are to share the result. What would you have me do?"

"My husband must be great. He must be honored. His name must be on every lip."

"That has been my father's wish. I have disappointed him by my want of interest in public life. But you supply the inducement that was lacking. Oh! if I may be great for your sake I will!"

"You shall be great. Greater than your father," she said, eagerly seizing this new idea of ennobling him as the means of her own redemption. Then her thoughts passing to the practical aspect of present conditions, she asked, "Did your father also sanction your offering me your hand?"

"No," answered Lesley, fiercely, "I had only to consider my tacit engagement with Evelyn. Released from that, I am my own master, and if my father forbade the marriage a dozen times I would still make you my wife."

Still holding him from her she smiled in his face. She was glad to have this evidence of his independence and strength. For now that she was to be his wife she wished to find him manly and strong. Just as she had sought to discover his weakness as a reason for Evelyn to reject him. Still smiling on him she suffered her hands to slip from his shoulders and slide round his neck, and bending forward till their lips met she gave him his reward.

CHAPTER XX.

A REFUSAL.

"I wish to speak to you, sir, in private," said Lesley to Zassoulitch, when they arrived at the Prince's Hotel.

"Is it a matter of very great importance?" asked Zassoulitch.

"It concerns your granddaughter's happiness," answered Lesley, "and mine."

"Ah, *that*," responded Zassoulitch with an impressive bow, "is of such great importance that I should prefer to postpone it until to-morrow. As you see, I am exhausted by recent emotions, and not in a fit condition to give adequate consideration to a grave affair. The train, you say, starts at eleven. I shall be happy to meet you here at nine."

The old man opened the subject he had found himself too exhausted to discuss with Lesley the moment he was alone with Olga. A new complication was an effective stimulant at all times.

"What has happened?" he asked.

"Mr. Dunbar has asked me to be his wife."

The old man nodded and softly rubbed his hands.

"I thought so," he said. "I expected he would, and in your interest went to sleep—Well.

"I have accepted him."

"Naturally," with a little outward wave of his hand—"go on."

"Grandfather, we separate to night."

"Of course—and to-morrow, also, I intend to leave this country; you wish to stay?"

"I mean," said Olga, firmly, "that when we separate now it will be forever."

"That depends upon circumstances."

"No. Circumstances cannot alter my decision."

"But they may alter mine."

"Unless I am sure that we are not to meet again—you and I—I shall not marry Mr. Dunbar."

"Don't be a fool! You must marry him. I have not the means—if I had the inclination—to take you with me. I shall leave you here. What are you going to do if you don't marry Mr. Dunbar?"

Olga, with her hands clasped in her lap, looked before her in silence.

"We had better leave the possibility of meeting again out of the question," Zassoulitch resumed, after an interval of silence. "In all probability we never shall meet again after you have put me in the train to-morrow morning. It would need a very strong temptation to bring me back to this country, and it is not likely that you and Mr. Dunbar between you will ever provide that inducement. Don't be pettish, Olga. Try to be reasonable, and remember, my child, that small sacrifices lead to great rewards, and great results are only to be obtained by careful attention to minute details. Subdue the petty feeling of irritation and consider only the enormous advantage for which you may be indebted to your grandfather. You have rendered me a very great service to-day, and played your part admirably, and I wish before we part to discharge my obligations. Now what do you want me to say to Mr. Dunbar, when he comes to-morrow morning?"

"You will agree to our marriage," Olga said, speaking with an effort.

"My poor child! One would think you came of a race of idiots; absolutely you cannot see an inch before your nose. What would be the consequence of my consenting? Have you thought it out? Not at all. Tut-tut, poor child! The consequences would be these: In the first place, we could not part as you wish, and as I also desire. It would be impossible to leave you here without the means to live, even a couple of days, and with the possibility of having to settle with the Parkers. They might make it very awkward for you. By the way, I advise you to prepare for your meeting with them," he said, as it were, in parenthesis. "You would have to go with me. That would be inconvenient; still it might be managed. But we could not suffer Mr. Dunbar to accompany us. A few days would reveal the fact that we have no pecuniary resources beyond what he has placed at our disposal. We could not possibly go to a decent hotel. You would have to keep Mr.

Dunbar in ignorance of our whereabouts until a certain article of value is turned into money. That may require months of careful negotiation, and during those months we have to earn money for bread and shelter. During those months the Right Hon. Charles Dexter Dunbar will be doing his utmost to prove that his suspicions were justified, and to prevent his son making you his wife. He will probably employ the police. They will have very little difficulty in tracing us. I cannot think that we could live anywhere in Europe without being hunted down within eight or ten days at the outside and they would report to Mr. Dunbar that Prince Zassoulitch and the Princess Olga were living on bread and onions in some vile German sink. That would naturally open up fresh inquiries, resulting, probably, in our returning to England under an extradition warrant, to be sent for some years to a convict prison. I leave you to judge whether Mr. Dunbar would marry you even if you escaped the prison. I should think not. You see, I am quite as interested as you are in avoiding these consequences, and so I certainly shall not consent to Mr. Dunbar's offer."

Olga could find no weak place in the old man's reasoning. He knew it, and waited in patient silence for her to speak.

"What will happen if you refuse?" she asked at length.

"I shall direct you how to act when you take me to the train to-morrow; but rest assured that I intend you to marry Mr. Dunbar." He paused, and then added: "If only to prevent the Right Hon. Charles Dexter from taking measures to justify his conduct of to-day at my expense."

At nine o'clock next morning Lesley was at the Prince's Hotel. The waiter who took up his card returned at once, leading Ivan Zassoulitch. The old man was serious and dignified, yet perfectly suave. After the customary exchange of civilities, he said—

"Now, Mr. Dunbar, if we are alone, I shall be happy to hear what you have come to tell me."

"I love your granddaughter, sir, and I wish to make her my wife," Lesley answered.

There was no need for circumlocution, but the brusqueness of the announcement seemed to give Zassoulitch a rude shock. After a moment's silence he attempted to speak; his voice failed him, and he turned in his chair.

covering his face with a hand that trembled visibly. Mastering his emotion, seemingly by a violent effort, he turned towards Lesley, holding out his hand. The young man took it reverently, returning the pressure of the long, clinging fingers.

"This is foolish—unreasonable," said Zassoulitch, in a husky voice. "I was partly prepared for this by the few words you let fall last night, but until this moment I failed to fully realize the position. I throw myself on your kind consideration, Mr. Dunbar. You must think that my dear grandchild is all that is left me of my family—the one support of my declining years. To part with her is a foreseen necessity, but the wrench is not less cruel on that account. But that which moves me scarcely less is the realization of my dearest wish; believe me, there is no one to whom I would readily confide my granddaughter's happiness as to the son of the Right Hon. Charles Dexter Dunbar."

Lesley was astonished, as well he might be, by this announcement. Zassoulitch continued—

"All may be carried away by false conclusions; but only the man of truly noble mind can acknowledge himself in fault, and offer immediate reparation. Of course I shall postpone my departure; when do you think I shall have the pleasure of seeing your father?"

"I must undeceive you at once, sir. My father has nothing whatever to do with my offer of marriage."

The look of pain and astonishment in the face of Zassoulitch as he fell back in his chair was a study for physiognomists.

"Surely," he gasped, raising himself and leaning forward with one hand on the elbow of his chair, "surely you have reason to believe that this proposal will be acceptable to your father?"

"None at all, sir. On the contrary, I believe it will displease him immensely."

"Then you misunderstand me, young man," said Zassoulitch, severely. "You misunderstand me almost as much as your father has misunderstood me, if you suppose that I will be party to a transaction which may be considered by your father as great an injury as the stealing of a diamond. Do you hold me in such low esteem that you consider me capable of giving my granddaughter in unsanctioned marriage to the son of a man who has accused me of a sordid crime? I can excuse you, Mr. Dun-

bar, only on the supposition that you are too simple to know what constitutes dishonor." He rose sharply to his feet and raised his hand, silencing Lesley when he attempted to speak, and said, "I cannot listen to one word more on this subject. There is but one condition on which I will entertain a proposal of marriage, and that is that your father himself makes it—*chapeau bas*."

At another time Lesley would have laughed at the idea of the Right Hon. going, *chapeau bas*, to ask a favor of any one; at this moment his position was too desperate even for a smile.

"He may consent," he said. "At least you will give me time to obtain his decision."

Zassoulitch reflected a moment in silence, then he replied, "We shall leave London at eleven. There is time to put this simple question to your father by telegraph—will he sanction your offer? If his reply is favorable I may be disposed to reconsider the subject."

Zassoulitch folded his arms as he spoke. His attitude was statuesque.

"You will give me your hand, sir," said Lesley.

Zassoulitch unbent as if moved by compassion for the young man.

"Yes, I will give you my hand," he said; "for I believe that your intentions are good and honorable, and in thinking of the father I must not forget that the son has shown himself a friend. There is my hand"—he withdrew it suddenly—"on one condition—that if your father's reply is unfavorable you will not follow us nor attempt to renew acquaintance with my granddaughter should accident lead to a meeting." Lesley could not at once agree to a proposal which seemed to shut off all hope of future happiness.

"You hesitate," said Zassoulitch. "Yet I ask you to do no more than your own honor and respect for the happiness of my grandchild should prompt you to do. Olga is young, impulsive, unworldly. I tremble to think of the consequences should you awaken the dormant passion in her heart. I would rather she fell dead at my feet than be guilty of such folly as unsanctioned love entails. Come, sir," he continued in a quivering voice as he held out his hand again, "for my granddaughter's honor, for the happiness of an old man who has done you no harm, give me your hand with this promise."

"I promise," said Lesley, giving his hand.

It was a forlorn hope, but he sent a telegram to his father, asking his permission to marry Olga Zassoulitch. The answer came speedily, "No," and the telegram was repeated five minutes later that there might be no mistake about it. It was no more than Lesley expected, yet the blow crushed him. He sat for an hour in the empty smoking-room of his club, where the message was delivered, with the paper in his hand, blaming himself for the course he had taken with Zassoulitch, speculating vainly on what might have been. When the clock on the chimneypiece struck eleven he seemed to see Olga's lovely eyes seeking him amongst the crowd on the platform. He heard the whistle ; he saw the train glide away, leaving a blank space where that dear face had been. "If I hadn't given that idiotic promise," he said to himself with a groan as he rose from his chair, "it might have come all right in time."

Was there yet a chance of persuading his father to consent? Had Zassoulitch delayed his departure to give him yet a chance? The faint hope led him to spring into the first hansom he met after quitting the club, telling the driver to make for the Prince's Hotel at a gallop.

At the hotel he learnt, with sickening despair, that the Prince and Princess Zassoulitch had left at 10.30. The brougham that had taken them to Victoria had returned.

He never could recollect how he dragged through that miserable day, but the ending of it was vivid enough.

The lift conductor at Grandison Chambers said to him—

"Beg pardon, sir, but there's a lady wants to see you, sir ; she's waiting in the hall porter's room."

As Lesley turned, the door of the porter's room opened, and the lady came quickly out to meet him. It was Olga.

CHAPTER XXI

WON BY A TRICK.

"Olga!" exclaimed Lesley, in a voice scarcely audible, as he took the two hands extended to him, and he could say no more for bewildering surprise and the sudden rush of joy that overwhelmed him.

Olga's lips parted, but no sound came from them. She was deadly pale. Her lids drooped. Her chin sank upon her bosom. A sickening sense of guilt, the terrible consciousness that the step she had taken was irrevocable and might lead to the moral destruction, not only of her own existence, but of this man, whose only fault was love for her, were more than her strained faculties could bear. She felt the life blood ebbing from her heart, and if it were never to flow again, if she might fall, and end all there, she would have made no effort to alter her lot. But she knew that the battle must be fought and that courage alone could save her from shame and disgrace, and with this perception she straightened her limbs and clung with spasmodic force to Lesley's hands.

Lesley, alarmed by these signs of suffering, would have led her back to the porters' room, but she resisted.

"No—no," she said. "Take me out into the air. Let me lean on your arm. I shall be quite well soon. See, I am better now," and looking in his face she smiled faintly. The color had already returned to her lips. Her step was firm as they crossed the hall and passed out into the street.

"I must lie, I must be a hypocrite—I must forget myself, like any other actress who has to play a part," she said to herself.

"There is a cab at the end of the street. I will take you to an hotel," said Lesley.

"Not yet. We will walk. The night is beautiful; the air is good to breathe. I have a great deal to tell you. It is like food when one is hungry to have support when one is weak. I could not wish to feel stronger, having your arm to rest upon."

She spoke from her heart, happy that she could say so much without falsehood. "I could not do without you now," she added in a lower tone, clasping his arm more closely.

"Heaven knows how I could do without you, love!" he murmured, thrilled through with delight by her caressing tone and the clinging pressure of her hands.

"And yet you kept me waiting so long," she said reproachfully. "Oh, how many times have I called to ask for you and always the answer was 'not yet!' and when it was too late to walk alone in the streets I asked permis-

sion to sit in the room and wait for you; I grew sick, with waiting——”

“If I had known——” Lesley began. She interrupted him still in a tone of reproach, gentle as a mother to her child——

“You should have known, Lesley—Lesley,” she repeated softly, charmed with the sound of his name which she spoke for the first time. It was charming—his name—even to Lesley’s ear, with her dainty accent.

“I did hope,” he said; “and though it was almost breaking my promise to your grandfather, I went to the hotel on the chance of finding you there, and I learnt that you and your grandfather were gone.”

“And then what did you do?” she asked, almost in a whisper.

“What could I do but wander about aimlessly in despair?”

“Despair! Did I not tell you that I loved you last night, and give you all the proofs I could? A woman cannot retract who has gone so far, she gives herself wholly and forever who gives so much. After that nothing in the world but death would keep her asunder from her lover. That is what I feel, and this is what you should have known if my word was worth belief. If I had had to cross Siberia alone, I should have found you, Lesley.”

She said no more then. She felt and spoke with an unfeigned passion which she herself could not account for. A sentiment hitherto unknown had sprung into existence suddenly, like a flame from the union of two bodies. She felt herself endowed with a strange new faculty that gave to her life a value it never possessed before.

“But it was so simple—your card was in the case you gave my grandfather,” she continued, lightly. “I saw it there when he gave me the case to pay the hotel bill. You never thought of that, Lesley.”

“No; and if I had I should have scarcely conceived that you would have come to me; for surely it is not with your grandfather’s consent.”

“With his consent!” she exclaimed, and then evading the lie she said, “My grandfather! What is he to me now? Nothing. I am yours, Lesley—not his.” After a moment’s silence she continued, in a less impassioned

tone, "I know the promise you gave him when you left this morning. You were not to see me again without your father's sanction. Tell me, has he given his consent?"

"No."

"And yet you sought me," she cried in triumph. "Oh, I am glad of that! Now we are equal. We have struck off our bonds for the right to love as we will. We are free, Lesley."

"Yes," he responded gravely, for even love could not blind him to the serious responsibilities of his position. His tone excited a suspicion in her apprehensive mind which struck her with terror. The latent consciousness of her own duplicity made her doubtful of his good faith.

"But the step I took," he continued in the same grave tone, "is nothing in comparison with the plunge you have taken. What faith you must have in my honor!" Then, after a moment's silence, he added, almost with awe, "I did not know you cared for me so much."

They were on the deserted Embankment. Olga stopped abruptly and turned, under the light of a lamp, to look straight in Lesley's face. There was terrible earnestness in her now.

"Do you repent what you have done, Lesley?" she asked. "Do you wish that I had loved you less!"

"Wish you had loved me less!" he echoed in wonder.

"If you do," she said, quickly disengaging her hand from his arm, "the remedy is close at hand."

The still river, reflecting countless lights, had suggested an alternative to the shame and misery which she foresaw if Lesley abandoned her—misery the greater now for the glimpse of joy which had come with the birth of love.

She stood motionless before him, looking fixedly in his face for the verdict which was to decide her fate.

"What are you thinking of, my poor Olga?" he cried, with mingled fear and pity. "What have I said to make you think me so base? God forbid I should be so weak as to regret loving you—so heartless as to wish you loved me less."

"Say that again, Lesley," she murmured with fervent gratitude, clasping his hand between hers.

He repeated the assurance of his steadfast love in other words gently chiding her for want of faith.

"I will never doubt you again," she said, with a tremulous, hysterical laugh. "Forgive me—my nerves are unstrung—I seemed to be standing on shifting sands between heaven and hell. See how I tremble."

"No wonder after such a day ! I did wrong to let you walk. We will go to your hotel."

"No ; not there, Lesley," she said, with a new fear that the Parkers might have denounced her or be in waiting for her. Her repugnance suggested to Lesley fear on her part that her grandfather might have returned to find her. The clock of St. Stephen's was striking the half hour after two. Some place must be found for Olga, but where at this hour ? Olga proposed that they should return to Grandison Chambers, where the hall porter's wife had placed a room at her disposal. Lesley seeing no better course to take they turned their steps again towards the Abbey. With the quick revulsion natural to great emotional excitement, Olga was gay now, and walked with light step. But her late terror was not forgotten.

"Tell me," she said in her soft, caressing tone, "why you look so grave, Lesley."

"If I looked solemn it was with thought of the future, not of the past or present, be sure, love," he replied ; "and it is a serious matter to find myself suddenly in possession of a princess without the ghost of a palace to put her in—especially when one is as poor as I am."

"Are you very, very poor ?"

"Desperately poor. If the governor cuts up rough—and I can hardly expect him to be particularly generous—if he should cut up rough, I may have something less than the usual shilling undutiful heirs are usually cut off with."

"Then," she replied, stopping again and facing him, "I hope your father may cut up as you say, for, look, I have nothing in the world but what you see."

She threw back the light mantle she had taken at the moment of leaving Pangbourne and stood before him in the evening dress she wore at dinner, her beautifully rounded arms gleaming white as she held them forth. Lesley clasped her wrists together and raised them to his lips.

"You make me rich, love," he murmured, fervently, still holding her hands. "With these dear hands you give me more than all the fortune of all the Rothschilds. Money is worth no more than it will buy. Could money alone

buy me such happiness as this? What could it give that I may not win for your sake, Olga? Why, if I were not poor, you would leave me nothing to wish for; but being poor, there is something to strive for in whatever can add to your delight. Oh, I can almost wish with you that my father should refuse to give me anything; then I should owe all to you."

He said a great deal more that would not bear the test of sober reading, but to their minds, exalted with love, dreams were substantial facts, and to hope was to have.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE PARENTS.

WHILE Lesley was waiting in the hall the next morning for Olga the porter brought him some letters and a telegram which had just been handed in. Before he had time to examine them, Olga came to him with the graceful, even step, peculiar to herself, her countenance tranquil and bewitching as a starlit night, with no trace of her late ordeal in it save a de per shade under her soft dark eyes. He took her across to the Grandison Hotel and ordered breakfast. As he seated himself at the table by the window, his eyes fell on the packet of correspondence in his hand.

"This telegram may concern you as well as me," he said, taking up the buff envelope.

"It cannot be otherwise now, dear," she answered, tenderly. "Open it."

He read it:—

"You will find me at Gloucester Place before one or after six P. M.—DUNBAR.

"From my father," he said, handing the telegram to Olga. Then drawing a long breath in anticipation of the coming interview which it was evident had brought the Right Hon. home, he glanced at the remaining letters. A particularly bulky one commanded his attention. Drawing it out he found that it bore a foreign stamp and the Flushing postmark.

"The other father," he said to himself.

"You will see your father this morning, Lesley," said Olga, looking up from the pink paper.

"Yes, dear. I'll get it over, and we will know our fate as soon as possible," he answered, cheerfully. "This is from Flushing. Shall we leave it till after breakfast?"

"No, open it now."

He broke the cover. A letter, addressed simply "Olga," was at the top. That sent through him was in itself an accusation, a proof that the grandfather had no doubt as to Olga's elopement. The curt address intimated the kind of enclosure it covered, and Lesley handed it to her with a painful sympathy which would have made old Zassoulitch chuckle.

"Best to get that over quickly too, dearest," he said, and to spare her embarrassment he occupied himself with examining the rest of the enclosure. It consisted of the note case Lesley had given the old man, a brief letter, and a crowning piece of audacity in the form of a blank draft drawn upon a firm of Russian bankers in Lombard Street. The letter was of course written by another hand, but Zassoulitch had appended his own bold signature. It ran thus :—

"GRAND HOTEL DE L'UNIVERS,
"FLUSHING.

"SIR,—I enclose a letter which I desire you to hand to Olga that she may clearly understand how I intend to remove the stain she has cast upon her father's name should it ever be her folly to cross my path again.

"Also I enclose the note case which you placed at my disposition. How much has been taken from it I am unable to tell. You may, however, learn the exact sum by your own calculations or from Olga, who held the case until she left me in the carriage at Victoria. I beg you to fill in the blank order upon my agents in London with the sum you claim and release me from the last consideration connected with your name.

"ZASSOULITCH."

Lesley rose from the table, taking the letter and the draft, and did precisely what old Zassoulitch had foreseen with perfect conviction : he put them in the fire. As he turned from the fireplace he cast an anxious glance at Olga,

wondering how she would bear the ruthless blow which her grandfather had undoubtedly struck at her through his letter. She had read it. It lay upon her lap. Her eyes were fixed on him with tender steadfastness. Her grandfather had written the letter expressly to be shown to Lesley. In it he presumed that her elopement was the result of an intrigue, and a mutual understanding between herself and Lesley to take advantage of his infirmity and helplessness. He warned her that no excuse or prayer would obtain his forgiveness. He abandoned her to her lover, and called down vengeance upon them both, clearly intimating that he himself would avenge the dishonor by taking her life if it pleased Providence to make him the minister; and now, with the letter in her lap, Olga was asking herself if she might trust Lesley to keep faith with her without employing her grandfather's help. Was he to be won by love alone without the aid of deceit and treachery?

"My grandfather wrote to you," she said as he came to her side. "Why have you burnt his letter?"

"Because it could give you no pleasure to read it," he answered.

She smiled sweetly in his face as she rose to her feet, and, crossing the room, dropped the letter she held in the flames, which yet played with the ashes of the other. That would have greatly disappointed Zassoulitch, who had spent the greater portion of his journey in building up and decorating that letter for Olga's advantage.

"I pray Heaven that may be the only letter I shall ever burn without showing you," she said, returning to Lesley. "Oh!" she exclaimed, clasping his hands and speaking with closed eyes in soft, slow rapture, "it seems as if a new world were opening to me in which to live a new life, as much more beautiful than the last as"—she opened her eyes and looked with fervor in his—"as this light is to darkness."

They turned to the window as a circumspect cough announced the entrance of the waiter with the breakfast. Lesley dismissed the man when they were served. The note case still lay on the table. Assuring himself that it still contained some notes, Lesley passed it to Olga.

"While I am away," he said, "you can buy some of the things you need. Will you take a cab, and have one of the maids to accompany you?"

She shook her head and said, laughing—

"While we are poor we must do as poor people do—study economy; and the way to begin is not to have carriages and servants. When we meet this afternoon I will show you what bargains I have made. One day you shall treat me like a princess, but always I mean to deserve a better title."

"And what is that, dear?" he asked.

She leant forward, looking into his eyes, and said—

"Your helpmate."

At Gloucester Place, the servant who opened the door informed Lesley that the Right Hon. was in his private room—a room which no one was allowed to enter without permission; "but you were to go in at once, sir, if you please," he added.

Lesley passed through the dismal library, where a secretary was engaged in making extracts from a blue book, and, opening the inner door halted on the threshold on perceiving a visitor seated opposite his father at the writing-table.

"Come in," said the Right Hon. with a smile of satisfaction as unexpected as his cordial tone. "You have come at the very moment I wished. Sit down here." He pushed a chair to the end of the table, shook hands with Lesley quite warmly for one habitually cold and reserved, and then, turning towards his visitor, introduced him, "Hemmings—a police officer."

Hemmings, a wiry little man with a clean-shaven face, dressed in a closely-buttoned frock coat, had risen to his feet, and stood respectfully waiting further orders.

"You can sit down, Hemmings, and go on at the point you left off at. Hemmings," he explained, turning to Lesley, "is recapitulating the results of the inquiry he has been making since I telegraphed to him yesterday morning concerning the movements of Ivan Zassoulitch and his granddaughter. Go on, Hemmings."

"From information received," continued Hemmings, in a witness-box tone, "I went to Victoria Station, and there learnt that two parties answering to the description of Mr. Zassoulitch and his granddaughter had been seen. The ticket clerk is prepared to swear to being accosted by a young lady of prepossessing appearance, with a foreign accent. The luggage porter likewise distinguished them

by remarking that there were no boxes to register ; and the ticket collector will take oath that he noticed an aged party of military cut and blind of both eyes in examining the tickets of a first-class compartment. As the train started immediately afterwards, there can be no doubt that the parties went on. A telegram from the office at Queenborough leaves no doubt that this same blind gentleman was led aboard the Flushing boat. Therefore, sir, we may consider it proved on circumstantial evidence that the pair of 'em has got clean off."

The Right Hon. nodded approving consent.

"And now about the Parkers."

"About them, sir, the evidence is not quite so clear.' We know that they did not leave Pangbourne till yesterday morning, when they took the 6.45 to Paddington with a quantity of luggage. But what became of them afterwards is not yet proved. That they did not go to the Prince's Hotel is certain, though an unknown party, who might have been an accomplice, did make inquiries about Mr. Zassoulitch there in the afternoon. That's as far as our information goes at present, but, of course, we're only, as you may say, at the first step of the proceedings yet awhile."

"Just so. Now, as a man of wide experience in this kind of investigation, what is your theory with regard to the crime?"

"Well, sir, from information received from yourself and other sources, I should say it was a regular put up job between these Zassoulitches and their accomplices, the Parkers. The Parkers got the diamond : they handed it over to Zassoulitch when it was known that the servants were to be searched, and Zassoulitch handed it over to his granddaughter before he was examined, and took it back from her afterwards when her turn was likely to come. They get off to London and bolt for foreign parts the next morning, without waiting for their luggage or the Parkers, which they certainly would not have done being innocent, having previously settled with the Parkers where they should meet ; or, what is more likely, playing a besting game with their partners."

"That is my conclusion," said the Right Hon.

"I know it is, sir ; but allow me to say I don't see how the least intelligent officer could come to any other conclusion considering what you have informed us with respect to

these parties being previously convicted of stealing jewels."

"Very good," said the Right Hon. uneasily, as he rose with a glance at Lesley, whose face expressed contempt for the theory. "That will do for the present. But you will hold yourself in readiness to continue this inquiry. If it is necessary you shall follow these people—particularly Zassoulitch and his granddaughter—to their hiding place, and learn what they are doing there; but I do not think it will be necessary. You may call upon me again this evening after six."

He followed Hemmings to the door and then returning said—

"My son, I congratulate you upon your escape. It should teach you to rely with less confidence upon your own judgment than on that of those who have lived longer and learnt more of mankind. Until this hour I have suffered more than perhaps you can imagine under the painful apprehension that your extravagant passion would lead you to commit some rash act which would ruin your life and my tranquillity. Happily you had a sufficient sense of duty to respect the refusal I gave to your impossible request."

Lesley, with his elbow on his knees, followed the pattern on the carpet in silence. The Right Hon., casting another uneasy glance at him under his brows, sat down, crossed his legs, set his elbows on the arms of his chair, and joined his extended fingers symmetrically.

"I may tell you now that I have known since the beginning of this month, on the positive assurance of the Russian minister, that this blind impostor, calling himself Zassoulitch, is a thief named Isaakoff, who was sent with his family to Siberia for a diamond robbery. You know now what these people are."

"I see no reason, sir," said Lesley, looking up, "to alter my opinion respecting Ivan Zassoulitch or his daughter. That they should be accused of a sordid crime by the representative of the Russian Government is such a palpable ruse to discredit a political refugee that it is unworthy of consideration."

"You have heard the detective?"

"Yes, sir. I heard him propound a theory which he admits was suggested by you, and supports, by your presumption, that Zassoulitch is a convicted thief."

"Even your stubborn perversity cannot blind you to

the conclusion drawn from positive evidence. The fact that grandfather and child have bolted without daring to wait for the common articles necessary for a voyage should convince you of their guilt."

"Which do you consider the more guilty, sir, the granddaughter or the grandfather?"

"There is little difference between them; but if old age is an excuse for anything, then the granddaughter is the worse of the two."

"And you would convict her of participation in the robbery on the evidence of this detective as to her flight yesterday morning?"

"I would," said the Right Hon., with emphasis.

"Then, sir," said Lesley, triumphantly, "you would convict her unjustly, and be as much at fault as this intelligent policeman. Olga Zassoulitch did not leave England yesterday. I was with her an hour ago."

"Did not leave England!" exclaimed the Right Hon., in consternation.

"I should have brought her with me if——"

The Right Hon. checked him with a gesture and said—

"You did well to spare me that affront. It is sufficient to see my son exult in my mortification."

"You misunderstand me, father," said Lesley, with feeling; "if I exult it is in the vindication of Olga's honor, not in proving your injustice."

"What it pleases you to call my injustice has yet to be proved," said the Right Hon., angrily. "Where is Zassoulitch?"

"We do not know. He left England yesterday morning."

"And the granddaughter has accepted your assistance. Is that what you call a vindication of her honor?"

Lesley rose to his feet, with indignation flushing his face.

"Unless you wish to leave me with the impression on my mind which your statement has conveyed," said the Right Hon., coldly, "you will sit down, and as succinctly as possible tell me exactly what has happened."

With white nostrils and compressed lips, Lesley bent his head as he stood with one hand resting on the table until his self-control returned; then raising his head he looked straight in his father's face, and with careful exactitude narrated all that had taken place between himself

Zassoulitch, and Olga sparing no detail that might elucidate the position, exaggerating, nothing in the belief that the simple truth alone must reveal Olga's character in its true light and dispel his father's injurious prejudice. The Right Hon. listened attentively, and suffered no point to escape consideration, while two distinct trains of thought ran through his mind—one occupied in drawing conclusions from the facts of the narrative: the other in speculating on the personal annoyance and political injury he must suffer if Lesley actually married Olga. He foresaw how this atrociously romantic story would be hashed up by the society papers for the amusement of the public, and winced in anticipation, of sarcasms from Hon. members on the other side.

"I have told you all," said Lesley, in conclusion.

"And you have told it in a manner which certainly restores a great deal of the respect you have forfeited by previous want of thought. But I must tell you that you have altogether failed to shake my conviction in the dishonesty of these persons. In every detail of the story there is a fresh and convincing proof of shrewd cunning on the part of Zassoulitch, and of able complicity in his design on the part of the granddaughter. He gets away from a country where he cannot safely dispose of the stolen diamond, and with admirable ingenuity leaves his granddaughter in a position to command a most advantageous marriage."

"I have told her my position and what I expect in marrying against your wishes."

"You said so just now and I did not overlook the statement. But she knows that you are my only son, and that (setting aside any feelings I possess) my position would preclude my suffering you to starve."

"I have nothing more to say, sir," said Lesley, taking up his hat with a sigh after a moment's reflection on the uselessness of protracting a discussion in which convictions were so diametrically opposed—"except that I shall marry Miss Zassoulitch."

"That is inevitable if you will believe in the honesty of that young person."

"It is a conviction which nothing can shake. Good morning, sir."

The Right Hon. rose to his feet slowly, thrusting his

hands in his pockets and raising his eyebrows in mental contemplation of a most unpleasant necessity.

"One moment, Lesley," he said, when his son's hand was on the door. "Your conviction, I presume, would give way before an actual proof of the young person's venality—an unmistakable proof?"

"Certainly it would, sir."

"Are you willing to submit your idol to the test?"

"Whenever you please, sir."

"Then I will return with you to the Grandison and see Miss Zassoulitch at once."

CHAPTER XXIII.

MONEY OR LOVE.

It was a very silent drive from Gloucester Place to Victoria Street. The Right Hon. gave his mind to statistics; he carried blue books in his brougham, and Lesley was in no mood to provoke conversation. Just before reaching the hotel, the Right Hon. closed his book, glanced through the open window as he put the book in the case before him, and said—

"This interview is likely to be as unpleasant for you as for me. You can avoid it if you like by leaving me alone with Miss Isaakoff. If you prefer to be present, I must ask you in fairness to say nothing which may bias the young person's inclinations."

"I am not less anxious than you that the test—whatever it may be—shall be final," Lesley answered.

The Right Hon. was known at the Grandison. When he asked for a private room the obsequious manager bowed him into a small writing room on the ground floor, and in reply to his inquiry said that Miss Zassoulitch was upstairs.

"Let her know, if you please, that Mr. Dexter is waiting to see her," said the Right Hon. with the slow, emphatic utterance which precluded misunderstanding.

Olga had not lost a second since Lesley left her at the stores in Buckingham Palace Road. In half an hour she had bought as much as most women, under ordinary con-

ditions, would decide upon having in a month, and hurried back to the hotel with a porter at her heels carrying her purchases. The reason of her feverish haste was a dread of meeting the Parkers, which grew with the hope of beginning a new and better life. She had divined the true relation that had existed between the Parkers and her grandfather, and she wished to replace every article for which she was indebted to them by others which she might call her own in order that she might say to them, if they dared to present themselves, "There is your property. Take it and leave me. Our connection is ended."

It was done. Every article of clothing, every trinket and ornament belonging to the Parkers, was packed away in a parcel, and she owed nothing to any one now—save Lesley. But how much to him! Not dress alone, but life itself, and this great new joy of living. Would he love her as well in this plain dress without the glitter of jewels as in the richer one. Looking over her shoulder in the glass she smiled hopefully. The plain, light, ready-made morning-gown fitted her well. Looking at her extended hands she found them not less pretty for the absence of rings. At least, her appearance was in keeping with her condition, and it was satisfactory to know that one might be poor and yet look graceful and nice. Just then the chambermaid knocked at the door and delivered the message communicated through the tube: "Mr. Dexter is waiting in the writing-room."

With one last hasty glance in the glass, Olga left her room, and ran lightly downstairs, expecting only to find Lesley: it was a surprise to find the Right Hon. as well. She did not lose her self-possession, but seeing the anxiety in Lesley's face, the uncompromising severity in the father's attitude as he rose and made a rigid bow, she knew that a trial awaited her, and for Lesley's sake prepared to meet it with all the address at her command.

Lesley's trouble vanished as he looked at her. Her simple dress gave value to her noble bearing; the modest dignity with which she returned the Right Hon.'s stiff salutation seemed to him to carry conviction of her innocence which must put injurious suspicion to the rout. She crossed the room and took a seat by Lesley's side, with an assuring smile of loyalty to herself and him.

The Right Hon. was not to be deceived by a clever piece of acting; that was no more than might be expected from

the descendant of such a past master of duplicity as Ivan Isaakoff. He seated himself on the opposite side of the table directly facing Olga, and went to business without preamble.

"My son has told me what has taken place between you and him since you left Pangbourne," he began ; "the point that most concerns me is that he has asked you to be his wife and obtained your consent. That affects me very deeply indeed. I do not wish him to marry you. It is undesirable, for many reasons which I need not particularize, but which you will fully comprehend when I tell you that I am acquainted with the history of your family, and know the particular crime for which Ivan Isaakoff and his son were sent to Siberia." He paused without taking his eyes from Olga. She met them without blenching, but made no pretence of misunderstanding the implication. As she did not choose to question him he continued ; "It is undesirable, also, for a reason which may not have been so patent to you : it would separate me forever from my son, and by ruining his position in society destroy the hopes I have fostered since his birth. This marriage will leave me childless and unhappy for the rest of my life. All this my son knows ; but it has not changed his purpose, and therefore I do not expect to change yours by any appeal to your sympathy or sentiment. I mention the existence of a very strong feeling on my part to explain the sacrifice I am prepared to make in order to prevent this marriage. To come briefly to the point, as my son obstinately declines to withdraw from his position by giving you up, I must ask you to gratify my wish by refusing to marry him."

"You spoke of making a sacrifice—not of demanding one—and a very large one from me," said Olga.

"There is a sacrifice to be made upon both sides ; yours I think may be made acceptable. Let us see what it is you are asked to give up with my son. I find by my bank book that there is the sum of thirty-two pounds due to him from the quarterly allowance I made him. That of course he can draw when he chooses ; but beyond that he has no claim upon me whatever, and you may be sure that I shall make him no provision which would render marriage with him advantageous to you. Besides this small sum and his personal effects at Pangbourne and at his chambers over the way I believe he has absolutely nothing. As you

see, it is not a very great sacrifice you are asked to make."

"No, it is very little, if there is no more than that," Olga said, quietly.

"Position in society is worth something, no doubt—especially to you. But that position cannot be maintained without money. I am open to correction in presuming that you have no fortune to bestow."

"I have nothing in the world," said Olga.

"My son has no special ability. He has studied medicine, but I doubt if his capacity will enable him to obtain anything higher than the place of medical assistant for years to come. And during that time you must of necessity endure privations and discomforts to which one of you at least has not been accustomed. The advantages of the marriage are few."

"Very few if there is no more than this to be found in it," Olga agreed.

"I do not ignore the existence of a certain amount of sentiment; but allow me to say that a feeling of such rapid growth cannot be deeply rooted, and may in time be replaced by another."

"Still, even a sentiment must be reckoned as worth something," said Olga in a tone of calculation which astonished Lesley much more than his father.

"Of course. The only question is what value it can be rated at in—in cash," said the Right Hon. "Do I make myself understood?"

"Yes, I think I understand. You are willing to pay me a certain amount, in cash, to give up your son. It is useless to be delicate in a matter of business like this."

The Right Hon. bowed assent.

"You have stated the case exactly," he said; "within reasonable limits I am prepared to pay your price."

"This is an insult which can go no further," cried Lesley, springing to his feet. "Olga!" he added, turning to her with shame and entreaty in his voice—

"You promised you would not attempt to bias Miss—Miss Zassoulitch," said the Right Hon.

"Isaakoff," said Olga, correcting him; and turning to Lesley she added, "The name should tell you, as it has doubtless told your father, that I am of Jewish descent, and for that reason open to any offer. Your father wishes to make a good bargain, so do I. Tell me if you can make a higher bid than he. What have you offered me?"

"My soul—my name!"

"Oh, a name must count for something!" said Olga, turning to the Right Hon. "One can do so much with a name. You would hardly like the name of Lesley Dexter to appear among the advertisements of young men seeking engagements as medical assistants. A name will obtain credit. Certainly you would not let it appear in the newspapers as that of a defaulter. You have considered this among other probabilities, have you not?"

The Right Hon. assented by a movement of the head.

"We must set that among the advantages to be given up," said Olga. Lesley, standing with one hand on the chair looked down at her, his brows knitted with incredulity, his face contracted with pain and wonder, while she lightly tapping her foot without any sign of emotion in her face looked straight at the Right Hon. and continued—

"On the other side we must take into account the disadvantage I incur. After throwing myself on the protection of your son I could not hope to be received in London society. The story might get about, you know, and people are so censorious, I should have to leave England. That, of course, you would not object to. But wherever I go I shall be in danger of being recognized, and then this unpleasant incident would be brought up against me, so that I could hardly hope to get a husband and have a respectable home, which honestly I assure you, is my great ambition, unless I had a considerable fortune to close people's mouths and my husband's ears. Even then I could not hope to win such an honest and good man as your son is. Still," she mused, resting her cheek on one finger and raising her pretty eyebrows as her eyes fell on the table, "money buys a great deal to compensate the loss of youthful hopes, and one can't hope to get all one wants. You have heard your son—he offers me his soul and his name: how much will you give, sir?"

"Name your price," said the Right Hon.

"It is you who have the offer to make. I ask nothing."

"We had better leave the question to arbitration. My solicitor——"

"No," interrupted Olga, "I would rather not defer the question. You might withdraw, which would leave me in an awkward position. I should be between two stools, as it were, and might suffer in consequence."

"Well," said the Right Hon, with a desperate effort, "I am prepared to pay ten thousand pounds for my son's folly."

"Ten thousand," Olga said with an air of calculation. "Let me see how much that is in roubles. Hum—hum—oh, dear no!" she exclaimed with a smile. "Ten thousand will not do at all. That would scarcely keep me for ten years, and then I should be getting wrinkled perhaps with the kind of life I must lead. As for a husband—who would take a woman with a tarnished reputation at the price?"

"I will double the amount and give you a tenth part of my fortune."

"That is better, but it is not nearly enough. You say you have two hundred thousand. To be fair you ought to be content if I leave you the sum you offer me, considering that it is to ruin my own young happiness and to restore the only happiness which you say remains to you. Jew as I am I do not care to palter about a transaction of this kind. If you do not agree to giving me a fair half of your fortune I shall decline your offer altogether."

The Right Hon. rose from his chair livid, took a couple of turns across the room in silence, and returning to the table, with resolution in his set lips and compressed nostrils, set brusquely down, seized a pen, and wrote a few lines on a sheet of paper.

"Will that satisfy you, madam?" he asked putting the paper before Olga. She took it up, rising from her chair and standing by the table read it aloud.

"I promise to pay within seven days from this date the sum of one hundred thousand pounds to Olga Isaakoff, *alias* Zassoulitch on condition that she relinquishes all claim to the hand of my son, Lesley Dunbar."

"The agreement seem quite correct," she said, "and needs little consideration. Here, on one side, is a man who offers me one hundred thousand pounds; on the other a man who offers me his soul."

Deliberately she took a vesta from an open box on the table, struck it, and put the flame to the corner of the paper while father and son looked on with feelings that made them speechless. When the last word was burnt away she dropped the crumbling ash from her fingers, and, turning to Lesley with outstretched arms, said—

"I prefer the soul—Jewess as I am."

The tears fell from Lesley's eyes on the bent head that *he clasped to his bosom,*

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE SISTERS PART.

THE last effort had been made. It had failed signally. No course was open but retreat with such dignity as dismal defeat permitted. The Right Hon. took up his hat, bowed his neck, and left the lovers locked in each other's arms.

Too stubborn to admit his conclusions wrong with regard to Olga, he nevertheless admitted that there was some excuse for Lesley's faith in such a woman and passionate attachment to her. She had given a proof of disinterested devotion not to be doubted by any one who loved her, and only to be explained by those who still mistrusted her by the supposition that she saw her way to getting greater tangible advantage by the marriage than was to be obtained by the handsome fortune she had rejected. It comforted the Right Hon. in his distress to think that a young woman of such character would for her own sake employ her remarkable capacity to promoting her husband's interests. He even went so far as to acknowledge that under her influence Lesley's abilities might be brought out, and his character developed to a degree not to be hoped for had he married a foolish or careless person. And beyond these consoling reflections it certainly gave him satisfaction to feel that his fortune remained intact, and that he should not be subject to those pecuniary restrictions which might have been necessary had Olga pocketed his promissory note instead of burning it.

When Hemmings, the detective, called upon him in the evening for further orders, the Right Hon. gave him clearly and emphatically to understand that he desired no further information whatever with regard to Ivan Isaakoff, alias Zassoulitch, and that he completely and absolutely abandoned all inquiry, not only as to the present position of the persons concerned in it, but as to their antecedents and past career. To make the matter more sure, he drew out a check for the amount due to Hemmings, and got

an acknowledgment for it "in payment of all demands." Old Zassoulitch himself could not have been more anxious to avoid exposure than the Right Hon. was now that old Zassoulitch's granddaughter was to be his son's wife. The problem had been worked out according to the old man's calculations, Q. E. D.

Olga shed a few tears on Lesley's breast after the departure of the Right Hon.—tears mostly of triumphant joy in the testimony she had been able to give of devotion and gratitude to the man she regarded as her saviour; but they were soon wiped away, and when they sat down to their own little table in the dining-room there was nothing but hope and happiness in their faces.

"It will all come right, love," said Lesley, cheerfully, and, on the strength of his belief, he took up the wine list, and ordered the best bottle of champagne to be had. "The governor never will admit himself beaten, but he can't hold out long against such a noble proof as you have given him."

"Still, we will not rely upon him—or anybody but ourselves."

"Not a bit of it. I'm going to work, and we'll be wonderfully thrifty after to-day," said he with a laugh as he filled the glasses. "What a charming dress that is."

"You will never guess how little it cost. You shall see the things I have bought, and how much there is still left in your case."

"And there's still that money in the bank," he said, gleefully; then, glancing at her hands, he asked in astonishment. "Where are your rings?"

"I am only going to wear one, dear, until we grow rich," she answered, bending forward.

"I'll buy that one this afternoon, and put it on as soon as ever I may. Shall it be a civil marriage?"

"What does it matter how we are married so that you make me your wife?"

"I'll see about that this afternoon, too. What else is there to do?"

"Oh, there is one thing that I should have thought of before all others," Olga said, with feeling. "One thing I can never forget. Will you take a letter for me?"

"I had forgotten Evelyn," he said, in a tone of deep self-reproach. "What an ungrateful debtor I am."

Olga wrote a few words, expressing the love and gratitude that welled up from her heart as she thought of Evelyn and of what she owed to her unselfish generosity, and Lesley took the letter to Pangbourne that afternoon, sending a telegram in advance from Paddington.

"The major met him on the platform. "Glad to see you, my boy—heartily glad," he said, shaking Lesley's hand warmly.

"It's all right with you, eh? I can see it is by your face. Well, it's a comfort to know that things are beginning to come round again. They've been cornery enough down here, I can tell you. It's a regular upset for all of us, though of course we do our best to make light of it and cheer each other up. But," he added, dropping his voice as though he feared to be overheard, "it don't do, my boy, it don't do. It's all very well to make light of trifling matters, but when its a big trouble like this, and everybody tries to make out it's nothing at all, it gives you a kind of disgust, you know, with things in general. I'm sorry to say I lost my temper at lunch, Les; for when my dear, good old wife was trying to show that we should be ever so much more comfortable in Switzerland—we're off, bag and baggage, the day after to-morrow, you know—more comfortable in Switzerland than if we had stayed on here, and had a house full of people for the shooting, I couldn't help saying, 'd—n Switzerland'!"

He shook his head in rueful silence and continued—

"In the ordinary course of things, you know, my dear wife would have fainted away before such an outburst, or burst into tears at the least. But she didn't: not a bit of it. She turned round on me and gave me such a dusting down as I've never had before in the whole course of my matrimonial experiences. Evelyn, at least you might think would stand neuter in such an affair. Did she?" tossing his head in contempt at the idea; "not a bit of it. She let fly first at me, then at her mother, and said such nasty truths about both of us that our guns were silenced. And quite time, too, for I dare say we had been banging away at each other for a full five minutes. However, I do believe it did us all good—cleared the air like a thunder storm. But we don't want any more of it, all the same. They've gone over to Reading—started just before your wire came; however, they'll be back to seven o'clock dinner, and in the meanwhile you and I will have a bottle and a cigar, and

you must tell me all that has happened. Lord ! how glad I am to see you, Les, it seems as if we haven't had a friend in the house for months. All felt it necessary to go away after that affair ; though they might have known that if ever friends were needed it was at such a miserable time as that. However, off they went as if smallpox had broken out in the house, and, upon my honor, if half the household were dead of it, the place couldn't be more gloomy and dismal. It isn't all due to the loss of that diamond, which means best half of my capital gone—it isn't that exactly, though, of course, a loss of that kind is irritating—but it's this rupture in pleasant relations that bothers us all. There's your father, you know—a man that I've always looked up to as the wisest and most reliable man in the county—well, he behaved like a fool—excuse my bluntness, Les—and not a pleasant sort of fool either. I can't forgive him yet, and if any one told me that he had got into another mess I should feel delighted to hear it. After that there was the mortification and grief of seeing two of my most honored guests go off without shaking hands. I shall never think of Prince Zassoulitch, and the manner in which he seemed to shake the dust off his feet as he left my house, without remorse, and the princess white as a ghost with shame and indignation ; oh, Les, I can't think of it ! And then comes the news from Evelyn that it's all over between her and you. I regret it, Les, but I don't blame you. You couldn't help falling in love with the princess. A man may be married and yet fall in love without knowing it." He looked round and added in an undertone.

"An accident of that kind happened to me in the early time, when we were stationed at Chatham, and if the regiment hadn't been ordered out in the very nick of time, Heaven only knows how it might have ended. So, as the wife has been telling Evelyn, she should be thankful it is no worse. However, we shall forget all our troubles before we come back from our tour, and we shall all meet, I hope, as if nothing had occurred to spoil the pleasure of life."

Having by this time reached the house, they passed through the garden into the library, where all the year round the major kept a fire burning, for the comfortable look of it, and seated by the open window that looked over the lawn, with a bottle of Burgundy and a box of

cigars, the jolly major listened while Lesley related what had passed since they parted. The major was especially delighted with the account of the interview between the Right Hon. and Olga, for though naturally the most amiable and peaceable man in the world, he was a good fighter and a sturdy foe, as he had proved in many a brush.

"Made a pipe light of a hundred thousand pounds, eh!" he exclaimed, slapping his knee. "Who could have doubted it of such a woman—a real princess? None but an obstinate misanthrope. I should have liked to see your father's face, Les, when she lit that paper. I wonder what he thinks of her now—what he thinks of himself? If I had been there, my boy, I wouldn't have let him off without a rub; I'd have shown him where the cavalry comes in to advantage: cut up his retreat and left him not a leg to stand on."

Evelyn met Lesley without visible emotion. She knew he would come, and had schooled herself to think of him as only a dear brother, and was prepared to play the difficult, thankless part of a sister, that the cast-off sweetheart's bitter disappointment might not mar his happiness. Fortunately he had so much to tell of an extraordinary kind that she had no need to express more than the wonder and sympathy she felt.

Her voice faltered a little when they parted: that was all.

"You know, Lesley how dearly I wish that you both may be very happy," she said, with a smile on her frank, open, sweet face, and no more than a single tear beading the lashes of her faithful eyes.

The major accompanied him to the station.

"Of course, your father will do the reasonable thing," he said. "It's his fault that you haven't made a career for yourself, and to leave you in the lurch now would be infinitely more cruel than if he had turned you out to fare for yourself a dozen years ago. Still, should you need a few hundreds to start with, you have only to drop me a line. It will give me real pleasure let you have 'em."

CHAPTER XXV.

AN OPENING.

WHEN they met next morning in the breakfast room of the Grandison, Lesley, pointing to a bulky packet on the table, told Olga that it had been given to him at Pangbourne to deliver to her.

"What can it be?" she asked, taking up the parcel and turning it in her hands curiously.

"Something your maid overlooked in packing up your things, I believe."

She laid it down with a feeling of repugnance and dread. She held the Parkers in horror, and anything connected with them excited her latent fear of discovery. In Lesley's absence the preceding afternoon she had packed everything that she wore on leaving Pangbourne, taken the parcel to the post-office, there writing the address, "James Parker, care of Mr. Phillips, Mr. David McAllister, Sandy's Row, Midelesex Street," and sent it off. The joy of meeting Lesley now was chased from her heart by a grim foreboding of evil that came with the perception that the past was not yet severed from the future.

"By the way, there may be some things that were left for Mrs. Parker to bring and which you would like to have," Lesley continued. "I remember you wore pearls, that night of the dance."

"I shall wear them no more," she said, hastily. "They would not be suitable to my position now, and if they were, I would rather have the simplest thing that came from you. Let me owe all to you now and always;" then, as if to explain her eagerness, she added, "Oh you cannot understand how I feel about the past!"

"I think I can, love," he answered, dropping his voice and leading her to the window as the waiter came in.

"The memory of that humiliation must haunt you like a nightmare. Still I think, while the unpleasant subject is *before us*, we ought to settle what is to be done about the

Parkers. I learnt that they had not arrived at the hotel when your grandfather left, and if any payment is due to them it is, as a matter of principle, scarcely fair to tempt them to pay themselves out of your effects." Olga drew close to his shoulder that he might not see her face as she replied—

"My grandfather left word where they were to follow him," she said. Oh, that this lie might be the last she ever had to tell him!

"In that case," said he, cheerfully, as he turned her to the table, "we may sit down to breakfast without any further consideration of the subject."

It was a pleasant surprise for Olga on opening the packet in her own room after breakfast to find that it contained nothing more than the MS. she had begun at Pangbourne and left in the drawer of the secretaire. Either the Parkers had omitted to look in the drawers for their property, or had purposely left it, as being of no value. She tied up the packet again and took it downstairs with her when she was dressed to go out.

Lesley was smoking a cigarette and poring over a directory in the writing-room. Standing in the doorway she inclined her head and smiled as he looked up, hoping that he would feel pleased with her toilette. They were the simplest, plainest things to be bought. She had paid a long price for her gloves certainly, but the rest were well within the means of a chambermaid to buy, yet a young queen could not have commanded a dress more perfectly in harmony with modest dignity, feminine grace, and delicate refinement.

Lesley threw away his cigarette, and closing the door expressed his admiration and love in a kiss upon her lifted cheek. Then he took her to the table, and with his arm around her supple waist they bent in silence over the big book, scarcely knowing in their happiness what it was they sought.

"What are you looking for?" she asked, with a little laugh after a minute or two.

"Why, the registrar's office. That's where we have to go this morning. Oh, here it is—38 Landor Street. We may have to live in the parish a fortnight or some such nonsense."

"In that case, ought you not to find a less expensive hotel for me?"

He laughed at the idea, declaring that the Grandison was the cheapest hotel in London and not half good enough for her. "It will be time enough to pinch when we're compelled to," said he.

She smiled, stroking his hand caressingly. His recklessness gave her as much pleasure as she found in being thrifty for his sake.

"One thing," he continued. "the delay will give us time to consider where we shall live after."

They still bent over the directory, aimlessly looking down the columns of names, too content to do more.

"Where shall we live, dear?" she asked.

"In the suburbs, I suppose; that's where poor people congregate. Hackney, Clapham, or Stepney; they're all alike: rows of little houses with little back gardens, garished generally with a great deal of washing; nothing to be seen but other rows of little houses, and more washing and a long straight skyline of chimney pots."

"You don't like the suburbs?"

"I wish I did," he said, ruefully, shaking his head, without raising his eyes from the paper.

"Then why should we live there?"

"Upon my honor, I don't know, except for the reason that other people dwell there—because there's nowhere else for them to go."

She laughed. His cigarette case was on the table. She took out a cigarette and put it between his lips; then, as she lit a vesta and offered it, asked if it would cost a great deal more to live at Pangbourne.

"Oh, it would be an economy to live there. No furniture to buy—no horrible moving to be done. I must keep the place on till the lease expires—so there would be one house less to pay for. But——"

"But you do not feel that you would like to live there now?"

"It isn't that. It might have been embarrassing if the Caldecotts were still on the other side, but they will be gone by the end of the week. The fact is, love," he said after a pause, "I was not thinking of my own feelings in the matter."

"Of mine?"

"M—yes."

"Lesley," she murmured, pressing her face against his

shoulder, "think of me always, dear, but not as an obstacle. The recollection of what happened there will not affect me a day, not an hour—not a minute while I have you to think about."

"How easy you make the past."

"What else should your wife do—what less?"

"It must be awfully nice," he said musing, as he half seated himself on the table, drawing her to his side: "when the beeches begin to change color the woods are simply beautiful. I know how the river looks this morning in this still flood of sunshine"—he was looking out through the open window—"with the lingering mist softening the distance, the old fellow at the lock sitting with his pipe on the bar, and a look of idle happiness everywhere. What a day to drop down stream in the boat or to saunter through the woods! I dream of that path we went up together when I dared not to tell you that I loved you. Oh, we must go there again, Olga! How the dogs would welcome us—Jack, and Sandy, and old Rags. We couldn't keep them if we lived in the suburbs. Hackney wouldn't hold them—they'd pine for a ramble amongst the underwoods. And when the leaves fall and the road is strewn with shining chestnuts, the rustle of the brown leaves as you kick them up, and the smell of them! And then when the days draw in and grow chilly, how cosy and cheerful the little sitting-room looks with a good log at the back of the fire and the flames licking up the chimney!"

"And the evenings would be long enough for the work of the day," suggested Olga.

"Yes; no jingling piano on one side and shrieking babies on the other to make it impossible. All my books and instruments are there."

"And you could tell me about your studies and explain the things I do not understand."

"And profit more than you imagine by your wit and keen perception. Oh, I feel that I could do good work now!" he exclaimed with vigor.

"You shall, Lesley. We will go to Pangborne and live there until you have made a name."

He kissed her and looked with wondering tenderness down into the face that stirred up all the energy and resolution in his nature. Then a cloud came over his face,

and as if waking from a dream he shook his head, exclaiming—

“What a fool I am! Worse—for I am cheating you as well as myself. We can't live there.”

“Why?”

“Because we can't live on dreams, and I must work, not for a name, but for bread and cheese. The governor was right—I have no practical hope of getting anything better than a situation as chemist's assistant. I must go out in the morning and come home at night, like the rest of them, and be thankful if I can earn thirty shillings a week. Instead of glorifying an ideal, I should have tried to show how the real may be made endurable. What pleasures may be found in Clapham—where we can seek a breath of fresh air on Sunday when I am not behind the counter: how we may shut out the coal smoke and fog from our rooms; how we may put bricks in the fire-place to save coal; and where we can go marketing on Saturday nights to get things a penny or two cheaper! What may be done to hide the hideous look out. Oh, hang it all!” he broke off, impatiently turning away, “I can't picture you with such surroundings or I might find it beautiful. Let us go out and think of pleasant things again.”

Going to take up his hat he caught sight of the packet Olga had laid on the table near the door.

“Is this the parcel I brought? I thought you took it upstairs,” he said.

“I brought it down again for you to see,” said Olga, coming to his side.

“What is it?”

“Some writing I began—the story of our escape from Siberia.”

“It had quite slipped from my thoughts. You found time to write there?”

“Yes; I thought I might begin to write while Major Caldecott was thinking about the preface,” she said, with a twinkle in her eyes. “And I meant to ask you to read it to-night, dear, but now I will ask you to look at it at once; for though it must be faulty, a great hope has come to me that you might make it the means of living at Pangbourne. Oh, Lesley, it's just as hard for me to picture you standing behind a counter as it is for you to see me going to market on Saturday nights for cheap things.”

"Let me see it," he said, eagerly opening the paper.

The quantity of matter astonished him. He sat down near the window with the MS. before him, and began to read with feverish haste.

Olga seated herself quietly by his side, watching his face as if for a verdict. He separated the second page before he had finished the first, and ran on without a change in the expression of his face. A smile curved his lips. Had she written something foolish, then? She did not interrupt him to ask, but waited and watched in silence. He looked grave, his eyes swiftly following the lines, then he smiled again.

She remained in doubt as to the meaning of the varying expression, until, coming to the bottom of the third page, he looked round at her in wonder, seized her hand, exclaimed huskily, "By George, Olga!" and went on reading. Then her heart beat freely.

He held her hand, and, to keep it thus locked, she used the other to supply him with the succeeding pages. In perfect silence he read on to the end of the chapter, then, laying down the page, he lifted her hand to his lips and kissed it in homage.

"It's marvellous!" he said, still in wonder. "How did you manage it?"

"I wrote what I remembered and felt—nothing but that."

"Oh, one can see that in every line. But the style—you must have written before?"

"Nothing of any consequence—nothing had made so much impression upon me."

"The English is so good," taking up a page again in perplexity.

"My father took great pains to teach me. He was a professor of English at the university."

"It's saved us," he cried, joyfully—"saved us from Clapham and penury. There's work for both of us—if I am worthy to help you."

"There must be defects?"

"For my own sake, I hope there may be more than I have found yet awhile. It is not finished?"

"Oh, not a third."

"We will take it with us, and we'll start at once. You shall hear if the publisher is not as enthusiastic as I feel."

They went together to the registrar's, where the neces-

sary formalities were transacted, and then on to the office of the publishers, but Olga would not go in.

"It will save time," she said. "In my presence they would not open the MS., for fear of having to say something unpleasant about it; but if I am not there they may be willing to peep into it and discuss its merits."

"True," said Lesley; "that is a practicable view of the subject that escaped me."

That was not the only thing that escaped his perception, or he would have known that a delicate consideration for his feelings was the actual reason for her declining to take part in the negotiation.

"And if it does please them, their praise will be twice as welcome, coming through you," she said in conclusion.

"There will be a question of terms to settle," she said to herself, as she went her way. "If I had to arrange that, he would feel that the money was all mine, and that he had no right to take part of it."

It was late when Lesley came into the hotel, breathless with his quick walk from the railway station, and radiant with delight as he greeted Olga again.

"You were quite right," he said. "We've been at it all the afternoon. They couldn't have kept you waiting while they were going into details, of length, and all the rest. It's settled. They are going to publish your matter almost as it is—serially first of all. The first instalment is to come out in the opening number of their new magazine—*The Month*. They're delighted; it's just what they want to start with. It's a big advertisement for the magazine, and for us too. I don't know how many copies—but a great number they said—are to be printed for the first issue. You are to have the first place, and the matter is to be leaded. It's a little late, but they'll make up for it by fresh advertisements and a perfect revolution in their arrangements. The portion was marked off and sent up to the printers before I left. Proofs will come to-morrow. An artist is coming for suggestions relative to illustrations."

"We will read the proofs together, and you shall correct them, dear."

He pressed her hand in silent assent, finding no words to express his joy.

"I'm not to touch it much—they hinted that pretty clearly," he said. "The fact is there are certain terms of

expression, and idioms, which stamp the matter with originality, and lend a charm to the narrative. They suggest that amendments may be more desirable when the story is published in book form, after the serial issue. It may need amplification in certain parts, and some sort of reconstruction ; in that I may be able to help you."

"I hope so."

"The book should contain four times as much as the portion you have written."

"So much the better. We shall have occupation for our long evenings."

"And what delightful occupation. One objection they made which to me seems very just."

"Tell me, dear."

"Your book opens with the escape from Kara. You say nothing about the events which led up to your exile."

Olga was silent. She had purposely avoided that part of the subject in her desire to tell nothing but the truth.

"It is not necessary for the serial articles, but it would double the importance of the book if the political question were introduced."

He paused, but Olga, pleating the hem of her handkerchief, remained silent.

"Of course it's a difficult subject for a woman to write about—abstract questions always are, but you have shown yourself equal to it in many passages of the part we read—and—and there, more than elsewhere, I might be able to help you."

"That is a great inducement to try, and if you think it necessary—"

"I do, undoubtedly, The first question that will occur to the reader is—why were they sent to Kara? And in justice to yourself you ought to tell them."

"Then I will," she said.

It seemed to her impossible to escape from the slough of deception and falsehood in which she had set foot.

CHAPTER XXVI.

HAPPINESS.

ONE afternoon Lesley ran down to Pangbourne to arrange with his housekeeper for the coming event. Mrs. Gough, a cheery, comfortable old woman, bustled out to the garden gate with the strings of her afternoon cap fluttering in the wind, and looked down the path under her glasses.

"Why, Mr. Lesley, sir! whoever would have expected to see you?" she exclaimed.

"Well, you seemed to know somehow," answered Lesley.

"No wonder, sir. Hark at them animals. When Jack and Sandy began I thought it might be some of them little ragamuffins coming into the garden after the apples. But when that Rags joined in, as wouldn't so much as growl if thieves were bursting the house, I knew it must be you. Why didn't you let me know you were coming, sir?"

"Because I'm going again directly. Draw me some ale while I go and quiet the dogs."

Lesley spent five minutes with his dogs and then entered the house, looking about him with the hope that Olga would like the place as he did.

"And you're going away directly, Mr. Lesley," said Mrs. Gough as she placed the tray before him, and regarding him fixedly with a motherly interest. "Nothing baleful happened, I hope, sir."

"Oh, nothing baleful," replied Lesley, with a smile. "But something is about to happen, and I have come down to prepare you for it. After to-morrow week I shall live here altogether."

"Well, dear heart o' me! That is good news, indeed, Mr. Lesley. To-morrow week you're coming?"

"Yes; and I shall bring my wife with me."

It took Mrs. Gough's breath away. Her chin dropped,

her jollity disappeared, and she looked at her master in genuine trouble. The suddenness of the announcement suggested a doubt which she had never yet entertained of the young man who for so many years had treated her with the respect and tenderness of a son that she had come to regard him with maternal affection.

"Do I know the lady, sir?" she asked.

"You may have seen Miss Zassoulitch."

"The princess?" she exclaimed, dropping into a chair.

"And you're going to bring her here in a week!" Then she added, lifting her hands from her knees, "Why, there's not time to get the curtains washed!"

"Buy new ones."

"And there's not half a dozen teacups left of the best set."

"We shan't want half a dozen. Two will be enough for us."

"Oh, of course you're not going to see company. There'll be no tea drinking—nothing! If we can get a bit of new paper on the walls it's a wonder. There's the ceilings, too!"

"Have them whitewashed."

"And the mess they'll make! What's to be done about that?"

"Have it cleared up."

"Ah, you gentlemen think you've only got to wish a thing to get it done."

"That's because we've got such capable friends as you to serve us."

Mrs. Gough still looked despondent.

"I know I shall fall out with that Mrs. Parker!"

"Mrs. Parker will not come."

"Then who's to dress the princess's hair?"

"She will dress it herself."

"Oh, don't tell me, sir—a princess must be waited on."

"Then send for one of your nieces."

"Well, sir, I'll do my best," said Mrs. Gough, with returning energy. "But pray don't expect to find the place half-finished, nor blame me if the princess finds fault."

It was done; they were married. Lesley Dunbar had made Olga his wife.

The day after their marriage they went to Pangbourne, where, contrary to Mrs. Gough's prognostications, but exactly as Lesley expected, everything was prepared for their reception—including Mrs. Gough in a black silk-gown and a new cap, with her niece in a starched print dress and snowy apron, her face as brightly colored, rigid, and shining as the "chiney image" which the old lady kept under a glass shade on the mantelpiece of her own sitting room.

Olga went over the house with Mrs. Gough, and the interest she took in the well-stocked linen press and other domestic details entirely dispelled the old housekeeper's misgivings with respect to the future happiness of her master. "She's as homely and pleasant as if she were English born and bred," said she to her niece. "And not half so haughtified as the rector's lady, princess though she be." And the dogs "took to her" at once; that was another favorable sign.

Olga was delighted with her new home—so delighted that when she joined Lesley under the verandah outside the bright little sitting room, she could only express her feelings in broken sentences, interspersed with hysterical laughter and tears, as she clung to her husband's neck. In the house itself there was little to stir emotion; it was pretty, especially the living room, with its view of the river and the hills beyond, decorated with some good water-colors and a few artistic treasures, and a commendable absence of gimcracks, and simply furnished with a piano, a couple of tables, and some deep, saddle-back lounges; but it was a home, and in it she found tangible evidence of the security she yearned for: a reliable promise of tranquillity and honest happiness.

Lesley's dream also was realized; and in addition to the pleasures his imagination had drawn, Olga's companionship furnished him with unanticipated delight. She found out charms that he had overlooked. A new sun seemed to have risen, revealing beauties hitherto unseen, and giving another aspect to river and wood, field and sky.

They talked of the work to be done, but did very little in those early days. The weather tempted them out of doors, and happiness made them idle.

"It will rain some day," said Lesley, "and the muses will be glad to creep into a snug corner of our room,

They'd scorn to forsake such sunlight as this ; and so will we."

Free from care, Olga desired nothing more than to steep herself in this great flood of joy. So they followed the inclinations of their hearts, and were happier than children, and as innocent, coming home from their day's wandering laden with bouquets of grasses and berries and glowing sprays of autumn-tinted foliage. Then, as Olga arranged their trophies around the room, Lesley, seated in his chair with a pipe, would rest his elbows on his knees and his face in the palms of his hands, and watch her movements with ever fresh admiration of her beauty, silent with a profound feeling of gratitude. The same inexpressible gratitude filled her heart ; but she had the woman's gift of talk, and so chatted gayly and laughed ; asked his opinion with regard to the position of a spray or the harmony of arrangement, quite content with a monosyllable now and then from her lord.

Of course, it was quickly known in the neighborhood that Lesley had married Olga, and had brought her to the cottage ; but as a certain mystery hung over the affair, and they had not made public announcement of the wedding, society left them alone in their seclusion. But in the nature of things that could not go on for long. Lesley wished it could. Olga desired it still more.

"One of these days we shall knock up against some one we know," said Lesley. "Then there will be an explanation, followed by a visit. The visit will have to be returned ; and when that sort of thing sets in, Heaven only knows where it will end."

"Are we obliged to return visits ?"

"They will look on us as a couple of vandals if we don't."

"If it pleases them to think of us in that way, why should we not let them do so ?"

Lesley shook his head, and in a grave tone said—

"It won't do, dear. This sort of thing is all very well for a time, but it can't last forever. I think you would grow tired of it, and I'm sure I should. Your beauty and your gifts were not bestowed for the sake of one happy man, but to give delight to many ; and I—well, I think Heaven has given me a certain dose of ambition that I may not be selfish enough to keep you all to myself. When we can afford it, you shall go into society."

Olga sighed, and hoped they might never be able to afford it.

However, they staved off the evil as long as they could. It was a source of much childish mirth and excitement in their walks to look out for carriages which might contain acquaintances on the road and dodge them; and to make cross cuts in order to avoid passing well-known residences; but at last in one of these very cross cuts, they came face to face with Sir Gregory Pincher, who was on the look-out for poachers.

"It is all over with us," groaned Lesley, when the explanation was made and Sir Gregory had left them, with the promise to call on them the next day.

But that which precluded any further seclusion was the issue of the first number of *The Month*. On the first page was this, to tell all the world what had happened—

OUR ESCAPE FROM SIBERIA,

BY MRS. LESLEY DUNBAR,

"(Olga Zassoulitch)."

The new magazine was everywhere: in high piles on the bookstalls; first in the files of new periodicals in the shop windows; it even found a place on the stationer's door-post at Pangbourne. And before it was well out, every newspaper had copied extracts from the article, apart from the ordinary critique. Then the weekly papers laid hold of it, and simultaneously the society journals took up Olga's personal history, and told it in half a dozen different ways. The mass of periodical literature that flowed into the cottage at Pangbourne from unknown sources showed that Olga's retreat was known. It astonished Lesley at first; then it intoxicated him with pride in the possession of a wife who usurped even the place of queens and statesmen in public consideration. It frightened Olga—numbing her heart with a terrible dread of the slough from which she had only obtained a momentary escape.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE TURNING POINT.

Just at this time the long spell of exceptionally fine weather came to an end, and the rain fell in revengeful torrents. To Olga, whose mind was not free from the feminine tendency to believe in supernatural manifestations, there was significance in those frowning clouds that veiled the sun without a rift to give a glimpse of brightness beyond. The flowers were beaten down in the garden; the birds were silent; there was no sound but the sighing and moaning of the wind, and the splash of drops from the eaves, falling like heavy tears. They had been married a month—a month of brilliant color and generous warmth and cheerful sounds. Was her term of exquisite joy to end thus in chilly gloom, with tears and sighs from a stricken heart? She reproached herself with a disloyal want of faith in Lesley, with entertaining bodings that could only be realized by the loss of his love, and tried to reason herself into a happier mood. What had she to fear from the unlooked-for sensation her article had produced and the publicity it gave her? Her grandfather and the Parkers rose like spectres before her mind's eye in answer to the question. But was not the fear they raised as remote as themselves? What would tempt her grandfather to return to England? Not her prosperity alone. And the pecuniary result of her literary success would not be sufficient to meet his large views—especially now that she had a husband's protection. And what claim could the Parkers have on her? She owed them nothing. She had made no compact with them. Only a spirit of revenge could incite them to injure her; and why should they be hostile to her? And why should they bear her ill-will? They were ignorant even of the fact that she had aided her grandfather in the robbery. The argument was good enough, but sentiment would not

give way to reason, and her only hope was this outburst of popularity would subside quietly, and that their scanty means would compel them to live in retirement.

The change of weather had a quite contrary effect upon Lesley. Coming briskly into the breakfast room as Olga turned from the window, he exclaimed—

"A bright fire and a whiff of toasting bacon, and the rain pelting against the windows—now one can appreciate the blessings of a home—with a wife in it," he added, drawing her to him as he leaned against the chimney piece. "A steady, determined downpour—it looks like a thorough break up of the fine weather."

"And that pleases you?"

"Upon my word I think it does. You regret it?" he said, observing the shade of sadness in her face. She nodded her head in silence.

"You are thinking," he continued, "that if this weather holds out we shall have a little too much of home and its blessings?" She shook her head in protest.

"What then?"

"I was thinking how full of happiness this month has been—so full that I could not wish for change. It is childish to think like that, I know; but then, I have felt so like a child."

"Oh, come to that, love, it's just as childish to be pleased with a change, as I am."

"You had a better reason than that. Tell me, that I may share your pleasure."

"If I had a more respectable reason, it was a certain promise of mental activity that confinement within doors suggested. We must work now; and we are to work together. You can't know what delight that will give me."

"Scold me for not knowing it," she said, tenderly. "We will begin to-day."

The girl brought in breakfast, and with it a pile of letters and papers—mostly for Olga.

"My labor begins to day, The opening chapters of the book must be begun and I'll tell you how we'll do it," said Lesley, as he seated himself at the table. "We'll run through the papers, and knock off the correspondence this morning; then, after lunch, we will draw up our chairs before the fire, and you shall tell me about your early life and your father, and the events that led up to your banishment. That will be an easy beginning."

He could have proposed no harder task. Olga's heart sank with the prospect of inventing a consistent tissue of falsehoods that should conceal the truth and deceive her husband.

"Need we touch that yet awhile?" she asked. "The history of the escape has to be finished."

"Yes; but it's clearer than ever that I ought not to touch that. The reviews all praise your style. I should only spoil the verisimilitude by altering a word. I must confine myself to the biographical sketch which is to preface your narrative. You see, dear," he added, noticing the compunction in Olga's face, which he was at a loss to understand "without such data I can do nothing. I must simply sit and look on at you until I have some idea to work on. It won't take long, and you can tell me without any attempt at literary construction."

"I will do as you wish, of course," she said, with as much composure as she could command; "and I will do my best."

She was unusually silent during breakfast, and the moment it was over, turned with a forced expression of interest to the heap of letters and papers on the side-table. Would it be safe to tell any truth concerning her family and her life prior to her experiences in Siberia? Would it not be wiser to lie throughout, and trust solely to her imagination? She had told him that her father was a professor in the Moscow University, but he was known there by his real name, Laban Isaakoff. She foresaw that the Russian Government, interested in exposing fraud, would not fail to point this out when it came under notice. Frequent reference had been made to the Princess Radozski, and her grandfather had boldly introduced other equally well-known names in his narrative; and they, too, would probably disclaim all knowledge of Olga Zassoulitch and her family when the book was published. Those names must not appear in the book; yet what plausible pretext could she find to induce Lesley to suppress them in the biographical sketch he was about to write? Some must be found at once, and a definite outline of the fictitious history drawn out in her mind before the terrible hour after lunch, when her husband would question her about the past. No wonder, then, that she was silent and constrained.

She was so unlike the gay and cheerful companion of previous days that Lesley could not fail to observe the change. When he turned from stirring the fire and glanced across at her, she, who usually anticipated his regard, and met his eyes with responsive love, seemed now purposely to see nothing but the letter quivering in her hand.

"Something has upset the little wife," he said to himself; "I wonder what it is?"

He lit his pipe, and seated himself by the fire with the newspapers, leaving the three or four letters that fell to his share to be read later on. Newspapers now furnished him with an excitement which he had never before experienced. They came from the publishers and the wide circle of persons who claimed acquaintance with Olga, and contained notices of her article in *The Month* or personal ana, all carefully marked. Lesley read every line that concerned his wife with greedy avidity, and saw nothing else. A line of merited praise would make his hair bristle and send a thrill down his back. "It is my wife, my own Olga, whom all the world is talking about," he said to himself, with exultant pride. He kept a large pair of scissors for cutting out extracts; his pockets bulged out with press clippings. A few of the personal paragraphs were vulgar and impertinent; those he usually destroyed without a second reading.

There was a paragraph of that kind in the *Interviewer*—a flippant notice sent him by "some d—d good-natured friend" this morning. After a paragraph devoted to praising Olga's brilliant and absorbing contributions to *The Month*, another began :—

"Extraordinary people do extraordinary things. That the Princess Olga Zassoulitch should write the article above noticed is less surprising to those who had the advantage of meeting the witty and fascinating young exile, when she made her appearance in London society a few months back, than the fact that she has married Mr. Lesley Dunbar. Who is this Mr. Lesley Dunbar is a question which may well be on every one's lips. What his claim to private and personal admiration previous may be I cannot say, but certainly up to now his pretensions rest on the very slender support that he is the son of a Cabinet Minister. Besides exceeding good luck, Mr. Dunbar may be credited with shrewd foresight, for undoubtedly his position in society as the Right Hon. Charles Dexter Dunbar's son will be greatly improved if, in addition, he is known as Olga's Zassoulitch's husband."

The Interviewer continued in the next paragraph :—

"Success intoxicates; and Mr. Dunbar has withdrawn his wife from society, and set up housekeeping at Pangbourne. Every commonplace young man is absurdly jealous in the early days of his married life, and there is, of course, no reason why Mr. Dunbar should trample on his instincts to disprove the rule. But the son of a Cabinet Minister should think of his own interests. Only in the East can a man keep his wife by locking her up; here it is the surest way to lose her. Pangbourne when the sun shines is pretty; when it doesn't Pangbourne is hideous. How a young woman of Mrs. Dunbar's temperament, fresh from the light of London drawing rooms, the harmony of sympathetic natures, the incense of flattery, will bear a week of gloom, solitude, and mephitic vapor, plus Mr. Dunbar, it is hard to decide. She has survived Siberia it is true, but then some people would prefer Siberia."

Contrary to his customary practice, Lesley read this paragraph through a second time, with a feeling which the writer could not have expected to awaken. The outrageous insult to himself, which might very well be regarded as a party by-blow at his father, touched him not in least. He could afford to smile at such a flagrant exhibition of bad taste and bad sense; it was the note of pity struck by the writer which caused a sympathetic chord in his heart to vibrate. Was Olga fit to endure the solitude and confinement she had accepted? In her generosity had she not overrated her strength to lead a life of such monotony? Must not the glitter and activity of the past months force themselves upon her recollection, and stand out in striking contrast to the dull future? Could an effort of will subdue her quick senses in the demand for pleasure?

He turned his head slowly towards the window where Olga had seated herself to answer her correspondence. Her hand was resting on the paper; she was staring out into the driving rain with sadness and care in her face. He thought she was looking forward. It was not so; she was looking back. He turned away his head that she might not feel herself observed—noiselessly crunching up the cutting and dropping it into the fire, grateful to the enemy who had opened his eyes.

"Selfish beggars we are!" he said to himself. "What seems agreeable to us, we take it, must be agreeable to every one else that has any sense. With a comfortable seat and a pipe I could just forget what confinement and solitude meant for such a sensitive, active soul as hers."

Now that the scales had dropped, as he believed, from his

eyes, he saw things that had passed unseen before. After the newspapers he opened the letters ; they were from friends congratulating him upon his marriage in terms of veiled surprise. Through the veil he perceived that the writers were wondering why he had taken Olga away. One more intimate than the rest twitted him with burying his treasure, and all took it for granted that he would bring Olga to London when Pangbourne ceased to be attractive to her. In the past few days he had received a dozen letters of the same kind and dropped them his pocket carelessly, but in every one of them he found now a fresh appeal to his consideration for Olga's feelings. He rose quietly, and crossing to Olga's side, laid his hand gently on her shoulder, looked down for a moment into her soft eyes with their inscrutable expression, and kissed her forehead,

"Nearly finished?" he asked, glancing at the long row of letters by her desk.

"This is the last. Read them, dear, if you care to," she said, taking up the pile of answered letters, glad that there was nothing there which she must conceal.

"Who are they from? What are they all about?"

"People who remember me more clearly than I remember them," she answered, with a little shrug ; "and they are all the same." She took out one at hazard and offered it to him. He read it through gravely. The same congratulations, the same carefully veiled solicitude on Olga's account, the same hope of soon again seeing her in society struck again that newly strung chord in his heart.

"And how do you reply?" he asked, laying down the letter.

"See—the same answer serves for all."

He leaned over her shoulder and read the page she had been writing. It was the briefest acknowledgment of congratulation and reciprocation of friendly wishes that courtesy permitted. There was not a word to betray her feeling with regard to this forced retirement, but for that reason Lesley concluded that the feeling must be one of regret, which, for his sake, she wished to conceal from the world. And this simple misconception determined the course of their lives.



CHAPTER XXVIII.

CHANGE.

OLGA had tortured herself in vain. When she went down from her room after lunch, her mind was as blank as the story she was to tell to her husband. She tried to regard it as a matter of pure literary invention, a harmless fable, an intellectual fiction ; but her conscience forbade her to entertain the illusion, and told her plainly that the thing was a lie to hoodwink the man she loved.

"How will it end?" she asked herself, as she paused at the door, pressing her hand to her heart to still its fluttering ; "how can it end, but in self-contradiction and a confession of falsehood?"

But the confession of falsehood must involve the telling of truth. And that resolution presented such fearful consequences that she recoiled from it as if from an abyss, and summoning her courage to meet the ordeal with resolution and overcome this last difficulty by self-possession and address, she turned the handle and entered the room. She expected to see Lesley at the table with writing materials ready to write down all she said, but he had made no preparation beyond drawing a couple of chairs before the fire, and in one of these he was seated with a cigarette, and one of the reviews from the inexhaustible stock in his pockets. He read an extract from it remarking upon the wonderful physical strength which Olga must have possessed to live through the horrors and sufferings of the march to Kara ; and then dropping the review fell quite naturally into the subject of her experiences, and led her to talk about her early life without attempting to put events into formal sequence. He was very tender and considerate, and made the task much easier than it would have been had he left her to tell the story in narrative form. But she could not look at him. With the first lie she dropped her arm on the elbow of her chair and bent her

hand towards him so that he could not see her face. Once or twice her voice faltered. She hesitated and showed embarrassment, and tried to excuse herself, still covering her face.

"Dearest," he murmured, soothingly, as he took her moist hand in his, "one cannot expect you to tell your history as if it were a story to please children—these memories must wring your heart; you can only remember your father with emotion."

She burst into tears at that—not for the loss of her father, but for the pain of deceiving such a gentle friend as this.

He jotted down the events she had narrated briefly when she came to the end, and read his notes.

"Is that about right?" he asked.

"Yes, I think that is all I can tell you."

"Then we need not have any more long talks on the subject," he said, cheerfully.

That was a moment of intense relief to Olga, but all through the night she lay awake, wondering what would follow when this story was read in Moscow.

"Here's an invitation from the Pinchers," said Lesley, when Olga came into the breakfast-room the next morning. "Dinner, next Thursday. We must go."

"I haven't a dinner dress, dear," Olga replied, with satisfaction.

"Then it's quite time you had. I'll see if we can have the fly this afternoon, and we'll bowl over to Reading. The turn out will do us good; here's another beastly day," he added, scowling at the thick mist that hung impenetrable over the river.

Olga did not observe the revolution which had taken place in his sentiments with regard to bad weather since the previous morning.

"But, Lesley, dear," she said, touching his arm, "can we return this dinner party?"

"Why not? Our room is small, but it is large enough to hold the Pinchers and half a dozen more. And they must be dull indeed who shall not find ample return for all they have given, in this little room, graced by my wife."

She nestled her cheek against his shoulder in silence, vanquished by the welcome flattery.

"A hermit's life is pleasant enough in the summer," he

continued ; "but not in such weather as this. We must have movement and variety and light to stimulate our faculties. You were not made for solitude ; nor I either. Why, even with you Pangbourne might grow wearisome if nothing broke the monotony of weeks indoors."

He spoke in a jesting tone ; but the possibility that he might grow weary of this life, which was so dear to Olga, frightened away the misgivings with which she regarded any departure from it. And she abandoned herself entirely to the pleasure of an afternoon's shopping with her husband.

They drove over to Reading. The hired brougham was cosy and comfortable ; the rain pelted on the roof, and trickled down the closed windows, the wheels crunched the soft roads, and they nestled close together with the rejoicing hearts of travellers regaining a lost path.

The dress was bought, and put in the hands of the best dressmaker in the town—Lesley having a fine scorn for anything cheap or second rate where his wife was concerned—and then returning by the High Street to the hotel where they had left the brougham, Lesley caught sight of a good jeweller's shop, and taking Olga in, without a word of preparation, he bought a couple of diamond studs for her ears ; and the insinuating shopkeeper presenting to his notice a remarkably fine ring which he thought might fit madame's finger, he bought that as well, though it emptied his pockets. In the brougham she scolded him for his reckless extravagance, but in her heart she exulted in this new proof of his uncalculating love. But they could afford this expenditure. On the day Olga's article appeared, the publishers sent her a check for £100, which she put in his hands with unspeakable joy.

"This is something like a nest egg !" he said ; but, happily, he was spared the mortification of taking a single penny from it for their common wants, for by the next post he received a check for £500 from his father. With this came a very cold and brief letter of explanation.

"As I desire that my son shall not subsist upon the literary efforts of his wife," the Right Hon. wrote "I enclose a check to meet your personal expenses ; and, in order that you may maintain a position of ordinary respectability, I have placed a fund in the hands of my bankers (Pelf, Lucas, and Co.), which will allow you to draw upon them

to the amount of £500 per annum. I wish you to understand distinctly, however, that this is the full extent of any pecuniary assistance you are to derive from me during my lifetime."

At that moment their Arcadian existence cost little. Summing up expenses of every kind, Lesley found that they spent a little over four pounds a week. It seemed to him that they could never want more than could be bought for five, and he laughed at the idea of ever having to touch his wife's earnings, or call upon his father for more. For what could they want more than such happiness as they then shared. But there is no fixed price for happiness.

The dinner dress came home promptly. It fitted perfectly; not a single alteration could be suggested. Olga's supple figure was one which appears in happy dreams to dressmakers—a figure that fits the dress, and necessitates no cunning device of pad and bone to disguise the defects of nature. And in this dress she went on that Thursday with her husband to Sir Gregory Pincher's, and woke up society in Pangbourne. Never had she looked so beautiful; the richness of maturity was added to the freshness of youth. Somebody with poetical notions compared her to a rose opened by the sun, yet still moist with virgin dew. Proud of the position she now held by right, she wished to be admired for the sake of her husband, who had given her this place. Her wit, tempered with amiability, her natural vivacity, her modesty and grace, together with the mysterious influence of personal beauty, won everybody. She was too far above ordinary women to excite their jealousy, and she charmed those who might have been her enemies through envy. It needed all Lesley's self-command to conceal the feelings that stirred his breast—to sink the rapturous lover and maintain the conventional attitude of a husband. He would have liked to go outside and feast his eyes upon her unseen, or found some coigne of vantage where he could listen to her voice without being taken for a noodle.

"To think that you are mine, and only mine!" he murmured, drawing her closer to him as they rattled home in the fly. It was a night of keen happiness for her also; that was only in human nature, and she was not an angel—not by any means free from human weakness and human passion.

Lesley saw more clearly than ever that her place was in society, that it would have been stupidly unkind to his wife and unjust to the world to keep her in seclusion ; and so he accepted the next invitation with avidity, and others which followed rapidly as it became known that they were "available." Olga's misgivings faded away under these new conditions. What harm could possibly come from these private dinners and dances? They were too unnoticeable to attract the attention even of such a paper as *The Interviewer*. The terrible old grandfather would certainly not intrude upon them while their modest position failed to excite his cupidity. She ceased to dread him at all after awhile, and accepted the invitations as readily as Lesley.

"It does us both a world of good," said he ; and she assented, feeling that excitement of this kind produced mental activity. Her pen ran swiftly now ; she got through a great deal of work. By the beginning of November, she found herself nearing the end of her book.

Lesley, having less to do, was not so energetic, but his part of the work was also nearing completion. The weather, exceptionally fine during the early part, had been as exceptionally bad in the latter part of that autumn, and about this time several families with whom they had been intimate left Pangbourne, after pressing Lesley to shut up the cottage and find a winter residence nearer London. He sounded Olga on the subject.

"I am quite content to stay here through the winter, if you are, dear," she replied.

"Oh, it's good enough for me," he asserted, stoutly ; and to all further persuasions, he made no secret of their pecuniary circumstances, declaring that winter in town was beyond their means that year, and that they were quite determined to rough it at Pangbourne. Nevertheless a feeling of dissatisfaction grew stronger and stronger in him with the monotonous persistency of the rains. They could count only three days in the whole month which had allowed of good pleasurable walks ; for the rest they had been limited to constitutional tramps along the high road under waterproofs and umbrellas. And now that the invitations were falling off, they were more than ever confined to their own little box.

"By George ! I should like to see the inside of a theatre again," he exclaimed one morning, dropping the paper on his knee.

"*A propos de quoi ?*" asked Olga, looking up with a smile from her desk.

"*Carmen*—Covent Garden—a column and a half about it."

"*Carmen !*" exclaimed Olga, in a tone of delight. "I should like to read the account."

"Better not," he said, tossing the paper to her. "The effect on me is pretty much what poor old Tantalus must have endured with that apple bobbing against his nose. Hateful weather !" he exclaimed, in a tone of exasperation, as he turned to the window, thrusting his hands in his pockets ; "and to think that we are boxed up here for about four months of this kind of thing !"

Olga, with the instincts of a good wife, sympathized at once with her husband's needs—a man has need of men's society, of change of food for his energetic mind—"he cannot by his very nature be content with the passive enjoyment of home life which meets a woman's requirements," she said to herself ; and while her eyes mechanically followed the lines on the paper, her thoughts wandered off in active search for the means to relieve Lesley's *ennui*. Presently she joined him at the window, laying her hand on his shoulder.

"It is gloomy," she said.

"Ghastly !"

"Couldn't you spare a day once a week to run up to London and see your friends at the club, or go to the theatre—say every Monday, and come back on Tuesday ?"

"Without you, my Olga ?" he exclaimed, with a laugh, followed by an affectionate recognition of her disinterested sympathy. "Why, I'd sooner go and sit with that old fool over there in the punt, and watch the float bobbing on the water. I should at least feel that you were near at hand. Leave you here alone ? A likely thing ! Why, you don't know yet awhile how necessary you are to me. Now, if you had suggested that we should go up together for a couple of days a week——"

"What then ?"

"Why, then I should have said we'll shut up the box and go to town for three months ; for with your wonderful knack of making a little go a long way, it would be ever so much cheaper to live in a flat for a week than in an hotel for a couple of days. And why shouldn't we ?" he asked, wheeling her away to the fire, and drawing her

down into the big chair. "Why shouldn't we? I doubt if we should overrun my own income; and if we did, you'd give me something out of your book when it is published in the spring."

"Something, dearest! I shall be unhappy if you take anything less than the whole."

In this strain they discussed the subject, Olga's impulsive generosity blinding her to all the objections she had entertained, and providing her with arguments to overcome Lesley's lingering hesitation. Finally he agreed to take the train for London at mid-day, and hunt up a man he knew who could tell him all about flats and their cost.

"And you will go and see *Carmen*, and tell me all about it when you come back to-morrow," said Olga.

"Not I," he answered. "We will see *Carmen* together, or not at all. I shall be back to supper."

He was off, delighted as a boy; and Olga knew that this quiet country life was to end. As she returned from the station, the sadness of parting with her husband for the first time was tintured with the shadow of that presentiment which had become little more than a memory.

When the afternoon post came in, a letter in a blue business envelope attracted her notice. She opened it first of all, and read:—

"18 BEATRICE TERRACE.

"WHITECHAPEL ROAD.

"MADAM,—Will you be so good as to allow me to call upon you one day next week with respect to a matter of great importance? I shall be most happy to suit my call to your convenience: or, if you prefer it, to meet you at the above address, strictly in private, at any time.

"Your humble and obedient servant.

"JANE PARKER."

CHAPTER XXIX.

MRS. PARKER.

"WHAT should I do if I were guiltless?" Olga asked herself, after reading Mrs. Parker's letter, and trying in vain to convince herself that she had nothing to fear from the woman. Putting herself in that envied position, she

felt that she should hand the letter to Lesley on his return ; but a second glance at it showed her the impossibility of doing that. The phrase, "I shall be most happy to suit my call to your convenience, or, if you prefer it, meet you at the above address strictly in private," intimated clearly enough that secrecy was advisable. Lesley would want to know what she meant by that, and, failing to receive an explanation from Olga would probably treat it as an impertinence, fling the letter in the fire, and forbid her to take any further notice of the writer. What other course might a gentlewoman take ? She might treat the writer with contempt—destroy her letter, say nothing about it to Lesley, and, standing on her dignity, meet the woman with at least some pretence of fearlessness, if she thought fit to come to Pangbourne without being bidden. On the whole, this appeared to be the best thing to do ; but it was not until she heard Lesley's step in the garden that she could decide to burn the letter.

"What a night !" he exclaimed, as she opened the street door. "Don't touch me, dear. I'm as wet as if I had been wading in the river, as I might have been if a blessed instinct hadn't guided me through the darkness to you." She helped him to take off his wet ulster all the same, and fetched his warm slippers while he took off his boots.

"That sloppy, execrable quarter of a mile from the Swan," he pursued, "has extinguished the last flickering doubt about the advisability of hanging on here. Though there is comfort to be found even in Pangbourne," he added, pausing as they entered the room with a comprehensive glance at the fire, the glittering supper table, the bowl of chrysanthemums, which gave it the touch of a feminine hand, and the wife by his side ; "though light and brightness, and all delights must be found wherever you are, so the argument against Pangbourne still holds good, and we will be off to-morrow."

"To-morrow, dear !" exclaimed Olga, her heart leaping with a secret hope.

"To-morrow," he answered, with boyish gayety, rubbing his hands before the fire ; "unless you are unusually obstructive. What is there for supper ?"

"Partridge, I think you must wait a quarter of an hour."

"So much the better. Time to get thoroughly dry and practically happy. Time, too, to give you a history

of my wandering and adventures since the morning."

They amounted to this—he had failed to find the friend he sought, but, prompted by affectionate remembrance, he had gone on to Grandison Chambers, where he found that a flat he had long coveted was to let. "I should have taken them when I had the chance long ago," he said; "but at that time three bedrooms, two sitting rooms, and a kitchen for a bachelor of modest pretension seemed too many; now, they are just the thing. Capital rooms, bright light, and a good look out, and rent next to nothing. We may give them up at the end of three months, but we must decide upon taking them or not by midday to-morrow. We will go up by the 7.30, and if you like the rooms, we will take them at once."

"Of course I shall like them, dear, if you do; but when shall we go into them?"

"In a couple of days, or three at the outside."

Olga reflected. Surely Mrs. Parker would wait as long as that for an answer to her letter before coming to Pangbourne.

"There's your hotel just over the way," Lesley continued; "we can stay there in the interval."

"Not come back to Pangbourne?"

"Why should we? We have no engagements here. There is no practical difficulty. We may hire what furniture we need—that will be ever so much more economical and less bothersome than moving heavy things from here to London, and back again. Linen, cutlery, and all that kind of thing, we can have from here. After supper you shall write a list of all we may need, and I will make Mrs. Gough understand that she's to get them packed and sent away by to-morrow night; she and Kitty to follow the next morning. Naturally she will declare it is impossible, but she'll do it all the same. It's astonishing what she can do when she tries."

"Then the house will be shut up the day after to-morrow?"

"For two or three months. If Mrs. Gough and her niece cannot acclimatise themselves in London, they may come back here when we have found servants to take their place. It's very sudden, I know," he added, noticing the absorbed expression on Olga's face; "but that seems an advantage in a case of this kind—it avoids a lot of little worries."

"Yes, yes," Olga answered, eagerly. To her the trouble to be avoided by this sudden departure was anything but little. It was possible that Mrs. Parker, coming to Pangbourne and finding her gone, would be unable to trace her, and abandon the attempt.

But the dread of this woman and her unknown purpose clung to Olga for many days after they were settled in their new home in Grandison Chambers. She started at every tingle of their door bell ; she quaked with apprehension when Lesley took in the letters, and turned them over to find which were for him, expecting each moment to see him pick out one in a blue envelope, and question her as to its origin. In the street, at the theatre, her eyes wandered involuntarily in search of that thin face and those angular features. These symptoms of nervous trepidation could not escape her husband's watchful regard. He twitted her, with rusticity, and laughingly declared that two months more of Pangbourne would have rendered her as fearful of London streets and London sounds as Mrs. Gough herself. Olga was thankful to have this explanation provided for her. As time went on her fears abated. No letter had been forwarded from Pangbourne ; and this seemed to justify the supposition that Mrs. Parker, after a personal visit to the cottage, had given up the pursuit. The distractions of London life, the perfect harmony that existed between herself and her husband, their pleasures, which increased as their circle of friends and acquaintances expanded, all tended to dissipate gloomy forebodings and restore confidence. But this happier condition was not of long duration. One morning, as she was dressing for a walk, the door bell rang. Mrs. Gough and her niece were out.

"I'll see who it is," Lesley called from the adjoining sitting-room.

Olga continued her toilet ; presently she paused to listen, catching the faint sound of a colloquy in the entrance room beyond. The outer door closed, and the next moment she heard Lesley's voice in the sitting-room quite plainly as he said—

"Mrs. Dunbar is dressing. She will hear what you have to say."

"I am much obliged to you, sir."

The clear, hard, staccato utterance of those few words was sufficient to identify the speaker and strike terror

into Olga's heart. Mrs. Parker was there, in the next room, with Lesley.

"But, perhaps, sir," the woman said, arresting Lesley, who had already turned the handle of the door, "if Mrs. Dunbar is dressing to go out, it would be more convenient if I called at some other time,"

"You said the matter was of great private importance."

"It is of great consequence to me, sir; but when I said it was private I did not mean that it was anything I could not tell you."

"Mrs. Dunbar will be alone this afternoon," said Lesley, dropping his hand from the door as he remembered that an engagement would take him out after lunch. "And may have more time to give to your affairs than she has at present."

"Thank you very much, sir. I will call in the afternoon, if it is not inconvenient. I should not have dared to intrude, but Mrs. Dunbar was always such a kind mistress to me that I felt she would not be angry with me for asking her assistance now I am in difficulties."

"Sorry to hear you are in trouble, Mrs. Parker," said Lesley, going slowly towards the passage entrance.

"We've been out of situation, sir, my husband and I, ever since we left Pangbourne. Prince Zassoulitch had no need of my services, having parted with the princess, and we thought we might get an engagement together as before. But we haven't succeeded, sir, and now having come to the end of our means, we are bound to separate. My husband has the offer of a place, and I thought the princess would use her influence to get me a situation."

"I have no doubt that Mrs. Dunbar will try to help you," said Lesley, opening the door. "I will tell her you have called, and will come again about three."

Olga with her ear to the door, had caught every word of the dialogue, and now as the outer door closed she breathed freely again. But she turned hastily to the dressing-table, snatched up a veil, and bent forward to arrange it before the glass that Lesley might not detect the traces of terrible anxiety which yet agitated her.

A simple application for help: this, then, was the climax which had kept her for weeks in suspense and dread. To what lengths would these unreasonable fears lead her? If instead of turning from the door Lesley had opened it, when the handle was in his hand, he would have found

her trembling from head to foot with terror ; she must have betrayed herself. Self-possession and a little dissimulation were yet necessary to conceal the workings of her guilty conscience, and she lingered before the glass, manipulating the gauze, as she brought her faculties back under control.

"Mrs. Parker," said Lesley, entering the room.

"I thought it was her voice," said Olga, assuming a tone of unconcern, as she bent down to arrange a hair pin. "What does she want?"

Lesley recapitulated all Olga already knew, and then said, "She seemed a very able servant."

"I had never to find fault with her."

"Then the simplest way of helping her will be to engage her for yourself."

"Oh, Lesley !" exclaimed Olga, in a tone of expostulation that marked returning fear ; "you don't know how much a lady's maid costs ; and I have no need of one."

"Of course, a man cannot know much about such matters," Lesley replied, with a laugh. "But I have watched you for five minutes trying to get that veil right ; and I should think it would be an economy to have a maid to do it for you."

Olga laughed, and finished the arrangement as Lesley, in a more serious tone, added, "I feel that we ought to help the woman."

"We will, dear ; but, if possible, in some other way. Now I am ready at last."

CHAPTER XXX.

BLACKMAIL.

PUNCTUALLY at three o'clock Mrs. Parker rang the bell. Olga herself opened the door ; the woman followed her into the sitting-room without a word, and stood, her arms folded before her, regarding Olga with cruel purpose in her fixed gray eyes, uncompromising resolution in her hard, thin, inflexible mouth. Olga's courage sank. She found it difficult to maintain a semblance of composure

before the ominous significance of this woman's silence and hostile attitude.

"My husband has told me that you require help," she said, seating herself.

"Is Mr. Dunbar at home?" asked Mrs. Parker, with a glance at the inner door.

"No."

"Is any one at home?"

"No. I am quite alone."

"You did not reply to my letter."

"It was not one that I could reply to. If you had addressed me in the terms you used in speaking to my husband this morning I probably should have replied."

"There was no need to speak that way. We understand each other. Mr. Dunbar thinks that I was your servant, and it's no good undeceiving him. But you know that I was not your servant, but a partner. If you think I've come here now to whine for help, it's because you wish to cheat yourself. It isn't charity I want: it's justice. You may call it thieves' justice if you like."

"You have no claim upon me," said Olga, seeking in desperation the arguments she had found to silence her own misgivings. "All that I had from you has been returned to you through your friend, Mr. Phillips. I have not a thing that belongs to you."

"Cheat yourself as much as you like, but don't try to cheat me, Mrs. Dunbar," said Mrs. Parker, closing her arms on her meagre breast, and stiffening herself still more. "You don't square me off by sending back a parcel of second-hand clothes and imitation jewels. You've got to answer for the diamond your grandfather made off with."

"I have nothing to do with my grandfather."

"No, because it suits you to separate. But you had something to do with him when my husband and I saved you from the workhouse, and you know the terms he made with us."

"I know nothing of any agreement that concerns a diamond."

"Then you ought to know. You knew what your grandfather was. You knew he was a thief."

Olga's head sank. Mrs. Parker paused to prolong the humiliation.

"You knew he was a thief," she repeated; "and you

knew that we were to play this game of master and servant till we found a chance of getting a big prize to share among us ! ”

“ Nothing ! Nothing ! ” Olga protested in agony, without raising her head.

“ You are not a fool, ma’am. You have more sense than most women. You played your part well. If you didn’t know that our game was robbery, what on earth did you think we were playing for ? ”

“ I understood,” Olga, said with effort—“ I understood that you were to help us in maintaining a position which might in the end enable us to repay your services.”

“ That’s something, at any rate, to stand on. You confess that you were party to that ? ”

“ Yes,” murmured Olga, in a voice stifled by shame ; “ I admit that.”

“ Very well, then. You have now what you tried for. Through us you married Mr. Dunbar ; and now hold a position in the world, pay us for what we have done.”

Olga raised her head, seeing, for the first time, the existence of this obligation.

“ We’ve no claim upon you, indeed ! ” Mrs. Parker continued, in rising indignation ; “ Why, you owe us for everything you’ve got.”

“ I did not think of that,” Olga faltered, in dismay.

“ Well, now you *do* think of it, what are you going to do ? ”

Olga rose, looking around her wildly, as if expecting to find an answer to that question in some tangible object that she might call her own. “ *What* do you want ? ” she gasped.

“ Our share in the diamond is worth ten thousand pounds. Pay that ! ”

“ How am I to pay such a sum ? ” Olga asked, despairingly.

“ Oh, we’re not unreasonable. We shan’t spoil our chance by asking impossibilities. We will take it by instalments. How much can you spare to begin with ? ”

“ I have no money.”

“ Oh, nonsense,” said Mrs. Parker, sharply. “ We read that you got a hundred pounds for your writing.”

“ I have given it to my husband.”

“ Then you must get it back again at once ; we’re hard up. And while you’re about it, you may get something more.”

"What do you mean?"

"I suppose you know where he keeps his money?"

"You mean that I am to rob my husband!" Olga's voice rose barely above a whisper. Mrs. Parker raised her eyebrows with an air of indifference.

"It's quite immaterial to us how you get it, ma'am. I say again, we don't want to push you to extremities. If you don't like taking your own property from your husband, I daresay there are other means to be thought of."

"What means?"

Mrs. Parker pursed up her lips, not wishing to commit herself unnecessarily.

"What means?" Olga repeated; "I see none."

"You go out a great deal. I know what ladies are. Something is always being left on the dining tables."

Olga turned fiercely as if she had been struck.

"Do you think I am a thief?" she asked, indignantly.

Mrs. Parker looked stolidly at the end of the room in silence for a minute, and then, losing patience, turned on Olga with a snap. "Well, look here, ma'am," she cried; "I won't be spoke to like that if I give advice when asked to. I don't care what you are or what you ain't. All I have to say is that you must find a hundred pounds somehow."

Olga reflected. She had the keys of the desk in which Lesley kept his money. She knew he had cashed the publishers' check. It was hers. Might she not use it to be rid of this woman? She took a step towards the desk, then checked herself.

"And after you have the money, what then?" she asked.

Mrs. Parker raised her pink eyelids in silence.

"Is it to end here?"

Mrs. Parker replied in the same way as before.

"Suppose," said Olga, under a new impulse, "I refuse to give anything."

"Ah, now," replied Mrs. Parker, descending from her pinnacle of silent indifference—"now you speak on a point that I am prepared to answer. If you refuse to pay what is just, and try your grandfather's game on us, we shall sell the certain information my husband has obtained to Major Caldecott, and enable him to have old Isaakoff arrested."

The bare threat staggered Olga; but after a moment's reflection, she said—

"You dare not do that."

Mrs. Parker tossed her head contemptuously.

"You'll tell me, perhaps," said she, "that we don't know our own business? We could have sold our secret and got off to America a fortnight ago if it had suited us." She paused, then, Olga, still regarding her with suspicious incredulity, continued. "You want to know why we didn't? Well, we didn't because we saw that it would suit you to pay us more to keep the secret."

"Shall I yield to a mere threat?" Olga asked herself. Mrs. Parker read the thought and felt it necessary to explain the position.

"Your husband's father employed a detective named Hemmings to run you down in order to prevent Mr. Dunbar marrying you. Hemmings could do nothing—they never can without bribing one thief to betray the others—and we were in no hurry. When his son married you, Mr. Dunbar dismissed Hemmings, being just as anxious to keep the crime dark now as he was before to expose it. Hemmings saw that he was not the only person interested in the discovery—Major Caldecott would be glad to get his diamond back for something less than its value. He set to work on his own account, and following up the clues he had got, found your grandfather. But he couldn't find the diamond. A nice job he gave himself for nothing. When he found he could do nothing with your grandfather he came to us. We knew where the diamond was four days after Isaakoff left England—not in his hands, you may be sure. We know how it is to be got. That's our secret, and we can sell it to Hemmings at any moment if we choose."

This again was nothing more than an assertion, and one which to Olga seemed doubtful. The incredulity in her face exasperated Mrs. Parker—naturally irritable and only patient by effort.

"If you don't know how our business is worked I must tell you, I suppose," said she. "Your grandfather left England without much ready money. He went to Hamburg—I don't mind telling you that—and took the diamond to a dealer: a receiver well known to us. The dealer lent him money on it, to be repaid back with interest when the diamond was sold. But a diamond of that size is hard to sell. It's known all over the world to every dealer in diamonds, and couldn't be sold without the risk of its being

claimed by the party it was stolen from. It is settled that if a customer cannot be found in six months it shall be cut up. That means a tremendous loss, and we ain't going to let it be cut up while we've any share in it. When we're paid off they may do what they like with it. One thing's clear—the moment it is sold, your grandfather will be out of danger. He prefers the danger to the loss. He thinks that he's safe; so he is as far as the dealer is concerned. The dealer wouldn't rob any of us—not a penny. But we know where he keeps the diamond. A word from us would lead to a search; the diamond would be found, and so to save himself the dealer would have to tell where he got it from: and before your grandfather knew what had happened he would be seized by the police. *Now* do you understand it?"

Olga made no reply. Her doubt was not dispelled; on the contrary, it grew, reviving hope and courage. She tried to read the truth of the statement in Mrs. Parker's wooden face. Under that scrutiny the woman showed signs of uneasiness.

"It's like this," she said, hurriedly: "the diamond is worth twenty thousand to Major Caldecott; if he can get it for fifteen, it's not likely he'll refuse it. If Hemmings can get it for ten, he won't refuse either. Ten is our share, and that's what we will take for it. And surely it is worth that to you."

"Ten thousand pounds!"

"Little by little," suggested Mrs. Parker, in a less insolent tone. "A little at a time;—we won't be hard on you providing it's paid up in six months. After that, as I told you, the diamond will be recut, and you will be as safe as if it had never been through your hands."

This allusion to her share in the robbery had an obvious effect upon Olga, which did not escape Mrs. Parker's observation.

"All that must come out," said she. "Why, it's worth as much as we ask to conceal what happened before the robbery."

This again was true. But how was anything like the sum to be got?

"Ten thousand pounds!" she murmured, tremulously.

"A bit now and then. You shall have time. Give me the hundred you promised, and you shan't see me again for a fortnight. Not then, if you choose to send the same

amount to our address—Beatrice Terrace, Whitechapel Road.”

Olga hesitated a moment ; then goaded to sudden recklessness by this pursuing fate, she took the notes from her husband's desk, and threw them blindly on the table. Mrs. Parker greedily gathered them up.

“It seems a lot to you,” she said, in a tone intended to be conciliatory ; “but it's nothing—nothing. It will come easier to you as you get used to it, finding a bit here and a bit there ; and if we can see a good safe chance of of your getting it still more easily——”

“Go, go,” exclaimed Olga, turning away with loathing.

By a coincidence, less remarkable than it at first seemed to Olga, a letter from her grandfather came by the afternoon's post, half an hour after the departure of Mrs. Parker. It was addressed to Pangbourne, and had been re-directed there. The enclosure was written in Russian, and ran thus :—

/ “MADAM.—As my infirmity compels me to employ an amanuensis, I must, of necessity, express myself under certain restrictions, and adopt a nomenclature which you will understand more readily than other persons. My chief object in writing is to offer you that guidance which you may remember I foresaw you would require. If you have not already received a visit from Mr. or Mrs. *Thompson* you soon will. They have devoted a great deal of time to me lately, and as their attentions were becoming monotonous, I suggested that they should exercise their talent in a new direction, and see if they could succeed better with you than they have with me. The poor souls were delighted with the idea, and seemed quite grateful for the hint (their intelligence is of the most mediocre kind, and they are altogether unfit for a fine art which requires invention and intellectual attainments of a high order). They will doubtless tell you, as they told me, that they know where the *philosopher's stone* is to be found. They do not know anything of the kind, and are perfectly unable to do me the slightest injury, as is evident by the fact that they have abandoned the attempt. Do not let them frighten you on that account. I am quite safe. But they may do you very serious injury. There are other discoveries besides that of the philosopher's stone which may damage your brilliant prospects. You must remember that they are clumsy and stupid, and consequently are more to be feared than if they were wisely wicked.

“It would afford me the greatest pleasure in the world to aid you personally in overcoming the difficulties which must soon beset you, but that is impossible, and I can only give you such advice as may enable you to beat your enemies. For they are to be beaten again as they were beaten before. On no account, however, must you suffer them to think that this will be their fate. On the contrary, you should flatter their vanity, and lead them to suppose that victory is within their reach. This you may easily do by listening to all they have to say with an appearance of pain and reluctance, which doubtless your own feelings will supply, and ac-

ceding to their demands partly—not by any means to the extent they desire, by giving small sums of money occasionally, or trifling objects of value, such as a ring or bracelet, from time to time. But in the meantime you must secretly work to obtain freedom, and the ability to defy them. There is one way to do this, and only one. *You must buy the philosopher's stone!* ”

Olga's eyes stopped there, and could go no further.

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE SHIRT OF NESSUS.

“You must buy the philosopher's stone”—in other words, the stolen diamond. These words dazzled Olga like a bright light in the midst of darkness. She could see nothing else, and at first scarcely defined what it was that inspired her with such astonishment and wild exaltation. Then the immense possibility suddenly flashed upon her of sweeping away with one stroke the disgrace of her life, the tormenting sense of dishonesty which clung to her like the fabled shirt of Nessus. And not only should she free herself from the persecution of the Parkers by secretly restoring the diamond to the Caldecotts, but the degrading debt to those generous friends would no longer burden her conscience. Hitherto she had shunned the consideration of their broken fortunes as irremediable, but now she could afford to look at it as a temporary loss which might be made good. At last her conscience would be appeased, and her cup of happiness be unembittered by remorse.

But was this great achievement possible—was the prize within her reach? she asked herself, after indulging her soul in the prospective joy. She eagerly took up the letter and read on :—

“The philosopher's stone is no longer in my possession; but it may be got any time within the next three months for a sum considerably under its value. Fifteen thousand pounds will certainly buy it, but I could arrange easy terms of payment if half the amount were paid down as deposit by the first of March next. For £7,500 and your note of hand for the remainder I guarantee the restoration of the philosopher's stone,

Even that sum may seem large to you, but do not let it discourage you. Remember what unexpected advantages you have gained in the last few months. You are in luck. The tide of good fortune is flowing, and it is your own fault if you do not benefit by it."

These figures conveyed but a vague conception to Olga's mind of the sum to be raised. It was simply "a great deal of money;" but the amount needed to secure the diamond was less than Mrs. Parker demanded for secrecy; and hope gave her reliance in the happy development of that good fortune which had already given her so much.

She was sitting in the fire-light when Lesley came home.

"Has Mrs. Parker been?" he asked.

"Yes, dear; but—" she stopped.

"But what?" Lesley asked, seating himself on the arm of her chair as he pulled off his gloves. She laid her hand upon his arm caressingly, still hesitating. Oh! it was terrible to lie and lie and lie to the man she loved and honored above all others; but it must be done.

"They wanted help—the Parkers," she said. "If they had a certain sum of money they would not have to separate."

"Want to open a shop or something of that kind," Lesley suggested, seeing her embarrassment.

"Yes, dear, and so—so I took my writing money out of your desk and gave it to her."

"Surely you didn't imagine I could object to that," he said, slipping his arm round her neck and drawing her head to his breast. "You sensitive little wife! The money was your own, and Heaven forbid I should question the use you make of it."

A few days after this, Olga received a letter from the editor of *The Month*, enclosing a check for £100 in payment of the second instalment of her work. She burnt the letter, and put the check in her purse, saying nothing about it to Lesley, for what pretext could she make for withholding the money? It would be impossible to acknowledge a second payment to Mrs. Parker at so short an interval without exciting his astonishment, if not suspicion and to avoid a second visit from Mrs. Parker this money must be sent to Whitechapel within the fortnight.

It was something, however, to possess the means of meeting her coming obligation. It gave her breathing space. There was nearly a month to look about her for fresh supplies. But the days flew away with terrible swiftness, and small indeed were the accumulations that took the place of the check she had posted to White-chapel. That trifle had not come by hazard; she was not altogether blinded by her hope of good fortune. The success of her articles in *The Month* suggested further literary effort. In Lesley's absence she wrote a story of English life as she had found it at Pangbourne, and sent it anonymously to a magazine that she might not deceive her husband. The MS. was returned to the address she had given with a printed form expressing the editor's regret at finding it unsuitable. She pinched and screwed to save a few shillings out of the housekeeping money; she sent her gloves to be cleaned to avoid the expense of new ones, and so add a few more shillings to her hoard. And now the impossibility of raising a single hundred revealed the absurdity of expecting to make thousands.

"I was a fool. I was mad even to dream of getting all that money," she said to herself. Nevertheless, the mad and foolish dream of buying redemption came back to her from time to time, filling her with wild hope, only to leave her in still wilder despair as she awoke to the reality. And every day the same mask had to be put on to deceive her husband. She had to conceal her uneasiness from him and the fear that constantly pursued her. Purposely she kept awake at night lest she should betray herself by a word of terror in her sleep.

She wrote to Mrs. Parker when the third payment became due, and they met by appointment in Kensington Gardens. Olga wore a thick veil. Mrs. Parker's uncovered face seemed to court observation in its severe respectability.

"I have very little for you," Olga said, as they met.

"I thought as much by your not sending a check. How much have you got?"

Olga produced a packet timidly, which Mrs. Parker took with an eager snatch. After a prudent glance to the right and left she opened it and examined the contents.

"Why, there ain't five pounds here!" she exclaimed, in a guarded tone.

"It is all I have,"

"Four—fifteen, six! What next?" She slid the money noiselessly into her pocket. "And then you have the face to tell me it's all you have, as if that was any excuse!"

"I have given you all that I could possibly get."

"Oh, don't tell me! I read the *Post*. You went to three dances last week," she said, with a significant leer.

"I know what you mean. But what you get from me will be mine to give. Nothing in the world shall induce me to do what you suggest."

"Oh, won't you? We shall see about that. Now, look here, I know all about it: old Isaakoff's been putting you up to this. But it won't do. We're not going to be served by you as we were served by him." Every muscle in her face tightened in vicious indignation, and the fingers of her folded hands twitched like the claws of a cat after an unsuccessful pounce as she recalled to mind the bland face of old Zassoulitch as he declined to entertain their ultimatum, and, in consideration of the trouble they had taken to acquaint him with their intentions, offered them all the coppers he had in his pocket to get themselves some refreshment. "If you don't keep your promise, we shall go to the Right Hon. Mr. Dunbar, and see what he will do for us. He is as frightened of discovery as you are. He showed that by stopping the police he had set to track you down, and no wonder! How could he show his face in public again, or keep his place in the Government, if it came out in all the papers that his son was married to a thief—that his daughter-in-law was an escaped convict?"

Olga shrank back under the cruel blow, resting her hands upon the rail beside her for support. She could bear this torture no longer.

"Have you no mercy?" she asked, faintly.

"Oh, I daresay we've got as much mercy as other folks. Why don't you ask your grandfather to have mercy? What have you done for us that we should be more generous than he is?"

"I have given all I have."

"That's a lie. I can see a ring under your glove."

Olga remember the happy day at Reading, when Lesley bought her that ring. "No matter, it must go," she said to herself, desperately; and she stripped off her glove and dropped the ring into Mrs. Parker's ready hand.

"That's better," said the woman ; " we ain't unreasonable. There'll be another check soon from the magazine. That'll square up till to-day. You've got pretty nearly a fortnight to look about for the next lot. Oh, you'll find it," she added, as Olga turned away with a despondent movement of the head, "if you keep bearing it in mind that we shall go to your husband's father if it ain't paid."

Incapable as she was of impartial consideration, Olga believed it unlikely that the Parkers would execute their threat ; but her grandfather had warned her that they might injure her through mere stupidity, and this might be the stupid course he hinted at. She dared not treat the mildest menace with indifference.

She told Lesley that she had lost her ring, and he, fertile in reasons to explain her strange behavior, found in this loss an explanation of the distress and agitation which overwhelmed her. He made light of the loss, and bought her another ring. But it failed to restore her happiness, and he began to watch her with an uneasy consciousness that she was hiding some other trouble from him. Some days after the third installment of her narrative had appeared, he said, carelessly—

"It's odd the editor hasn't sent a check for the last number. He paid on the day of issue for the first. Now there's a couple of hundred due."

She had tried in vain to prepare herself for this question. She had no lieready. "Do you want the money, Lesley?" she asked, evasively.

"Of course not, dear ; but I think we ought to take some notice of the irregularity, in case—"

"No, don't," she said, eagerly ; "I would rather not. My address is known. The checks cannot have been lost. I would prefer to have the payment for all later on."

Lesley changed the subject at once, seeing that, for some inscrutable reason, it embarrassed her, and gave no further thought to the money, but his wife's condition troubled him greatly. She was so altered, so unlike the high-spirited, open, light-hearted wife at Pangbourne. The change was made more evident by her constant effort to conceal the change. Her forced gayety was almost as painful to him as the pathetic sadness in her face when she believed herself unobserved.

The continual endeavor to deceive her husband and seem natural taxed Olga's power almost beyond endurance, and she seized every opportunity to get temporary relief. They went out frequently, and she abandoned herself to every form of excitement offered by society as a means of forgetting her condition. Those long nights of dissipation were precious, if only as an excuse for lassitude and silence during the day. She spent a great deal of time at the piano ; that also afforded her relief. She could play and at the same time think about the next payment without betraying the expression of terror in her face which she knew must accompany sometimes the maddening prospect of denunciation. One afternoon, Lesley, sitting with a book by the fire, said—

"Sing me that little Russian romance, Olga. 'My Love,' I think it is called."

She found the manuscript copy, and sang the first verses ; but, turning the paper a dried flower, picked in a Pangbourne lane, slipped down on the keys, and the memory of that joyous day struck such poignant regret into her heart that she could go no further.

"I can't sing to day," she said, laying the music aside and reopening her Beethoven.

Lesley came and seated himself by her side.

"What is it?" he asked, laying his hand on her wrist.

"You are always asking me that," she replied almost with irritation.

"And you never answer me. I must ask again, love—what is it?"

"Nothing—nothing," she said, shaking her head and still following the notes with her right hand.

"But there *is* something. Your face is getting quite long, and you look weary and tired."

"It must have been nearly five when we came in this morning."

"True—don't you think we are overdoing it—getting too much excitement?"

"Oh, I couldn't live without it!" she responded, dropping her hand from the keys.

"But you have done without it. And I know you were not less happy. How would it be if we ran away for a holiday?"

She turned round quickly, repeating his words—

"Run away!"

"We could afford a week in Paris."

Her countenance fell.

"Is there any place you would like better?"

She shook her head in silence, again fingering the keys, her chin upon her breast.

"Nowhere? Think. Let your fancy run wild as you used to do in the cottage sometimes."

She turned on the stool with a smile of ineffable happiness in recalling the past, flung her arms round his neck, and laying her cheek on his shoulder closed her eyes and dreamt.

"You read something to me one day," she murmured, "about Japan, where the people are simple and kind and delicate, where art and nature satisfied all needs, and girls come home in laughing groups from cherry gardens laden with blossom—oh! if some enchanter would take us up now, my love, and place us there to live out the rest of our lives in peace!"

"Olga!" Lesley softly exclaimed in wonder. "Is this the wife who said just now she could not live without excitement? Why, you are going from one extreme to the other!"

"Why not?" she asked, disengaging her arm and turning once more to the piano. "I must be one thing or the other. I cannot love without loving to extreme; I cannot be gay or dull but in extreme. Oh, there is no middle state for me—nothing to choose but life—or death!"

CHAPTER XXXII.

A RIFT IN THE LUTE.

OLGA had sung at St. James's Hall for the benefit of a great charity. Her reputation for wit and beauty was so widespread that her appearance in public could not fail to draw a large audience. Every one was curious to see her in this new character. The result of the performance justified the expectations of her most enthusiastic friends. The critics were unanimous in their unqualified praise of her singing, and after expatiating on the quality of her

voice and the extraordinary pathos with which she had rendered the simple Russian song she had modestly chosen for the occasion, predicted her position in the musical world would be as high as the place she had already won in literature if she chose "to exercise her vocal powers in the higher branches of the art."

The practical outcome of this suggestion was that the director of the Orpheonic Society wrote to Olga in a tone of courteous diffidence, asking if she would consent to sing in a series of ballad concerts to be given at the Albert Hall, and hinting that she might make her own terms.

This application came at a moment when Olga was torturing herself afresh to find money for the Parkers. She saw deliverance from present evil at least, and resolved at once to accept the offer. But would her husband agree to it? She was not certain about that. And if he refused, what other means could she find of quieting the Parkers? The dread of them impelled her to take a bold course. She made objection on Lesley's part futile by closing with the Orpheonic Society unknown to him. Before showing him the letter she wrote to the director agreeing to sing at the concerts on condition of receiving one hundred pounds down as a retaining fee. A check for the amount came by return of post, and she sent it away immediately to the Parkers. Then with the courage of desperation she took the director's first letter and putting it in Lesley's hands waited in breathless silence for what he should say on the subject.

"This is a substantial compliment," he said, looking up, with a smile, from the letter. "What shall you say — 'declined with thanks'?"

"No, I have written to say that I accept. The letter came yesterday."

"Olga!" he exclaimed, the smile going as suddenly from his face. He looked at her with incredulous astonishment, as she stood before him, silenced by fear and the consciousness of her own rash temerity. "You have promised to sing in this series of public concerts?" he asked in a low voice, glancing at the letter as if he doubted whether he had rightly understood the proposal. She could not confess the motive that had urged her on; she had no option but to defend her action.

"Why should I refuse?" she asked. "You were willing that I should sing in public."

"There is a great difference between singing gratuitously to support a great work of charity and singing for money to benefit yourself. This may be—probably it will be—very offensive to my father."

"What has your father done to command my consideration?"

"It might be offensive to me. Surely you should have thought of that."

"Have I offended you by writing for money?" she asked.

He did not reply. Her hostile attitude surprised him as much as the unusual course she had taken and pained him inexpressibly.

"The prejudice against singing in public is absurd," she continued. "You, yourself, condemned the writers who sneered at a prince because he played the violin in the place where I am to sing. If it pleases me to sing am I to be debarred by such prejudices as that?"

"Why didn't you tell me that you wished to sing?" he expostulated, in the same low, even tones.

"I thought you might raise objections."

"And forestalled them. You had so little faith in my love that you could not credit me with sufficient kindness to yield to your wishes, and rather than risk the loss of such pleasure as these performances may yield, you preferred to give me pain—oh, no, no, no, Olga: that cannot be! Tell me you did this impetuously—from want of thought, not from calculation—Olga, dear!" he implored, tenderly.

She covered her face with her hands—overcome by the gentleness of his love, and burst into tears—the first he had ever seen her shed. He was too generous to ask for other explanation; and she had none to give. When he spoke again upon the subject, it was to ask what songs she intended to sing. The reconciliation was complete; nevertheless there was a rift within the lute. In his wife's character there was a development which troubled him with many misgivings. Her craving for excitement, to which alone he could attribute her recent action with regard to this matter of public singing, suggested serious possibilities. Unconsciously he was losing confidence in her.

At his club one afternoon he met the editor of *The Month*. Their conversation turned upon the forthcoming book.

"We have done our work," said Lesley. "You can have the copy as soon as you like."

"The house won't publish the book before the serial issue is nearly run out. But if you would like part payment in advance——"

"Oh, we're not very hard up yet awhile," Lesley said, interrupting him.

The editor apologized.

"I thought," he said, "by Mrs. Dunbar asking for a check in advance for next month's instalment—I sent the check by-the-bye this morning—that you might be pressed."

Lesley did not express any surprise ; but on going home he told Olga of their conversation, adding gently—

"You should have told me that you were in need of money."

"I don't want you to feel that I am extravagant," she said. "I should not like to ask you for money whenever I wish to indulge a caprice."

He did not ask what these caprices were that swallowed up three or four hundred pounds in a few weeks : he did not attempt to calculate how she could have spent the money. But he was surprised, for in many things Olga seemed parsimonious ; and there was nothing in her dress or personal adornment which he had not paid for to account for large expenditure.

Olga was as poor as ever. She had abandoned in despair the idea of purchasing the diamond from her grandfather. All she could hope for was to keep the Parkers silent for six months until the diamond was recut. She hoped then to meet any charge that might be made with a bold denial—such a denial she dared not meditate now. The Parkers were ingenious in finding means to terrify her. They were never satisfied. The more Olga gave them, the more their cupidity increased. Their rapacity knew no bounds.

The effect upon Olga of continually practising duplicity, of perpetual grasping after money, of dealing with the villainous Parkers could not fail to be demoralizing. She lost softness and candor, even when it was possible to be gentle and frank. She lied to Mrs. Parker, in order to keep back a certain amount towards the next payment. In a certain way, she suffered less through this growing callousness ; but, in consequence, her moments of happiness were fewer and less exquisite. And at the time she

was thus consciously sinking, consciously losing self-respect, honesty, tenderness, and all that makes a woman happy, she was regarded as the most fortunate and the most enviable woman in society.

"What a successful woman!" was the trite observation on every one's lips when her name was mentioned.

And outwardly her success was phenomenal. Her public singing in no way detracted from the esteem in which she was held by society. It was regarded as the eccentricity of genius—the irrepressible self-assertion which is permitted to persons of exceptional gifts. She won by what seemed audacity. If she had needed defence, hundreds would have sprung up to defend her. Even the Right Hon. seemed proud to acknowledge her for his daughter-in-law when they met, and merely shrugged his shoulders equivocally when people spoke to him of her brilliant success at the Orpheonic concerts.

About this time Olga again met Lord Heckerly. Since their last meeting at Pangbourne this young nobleman had made himself conspicuous by losing one half his fortune on horses and sinking the other half in a new music hall. He prided himself on knowing everything worth knowing, which, to judge from his conversation, consisted almost exclusively of matters connected with the turf and the stage; and he had an easy way of putting himself on a level with everybody. They met one evening at a dance, after Olga's second appearance at the Albert Hall.

"Will you give me five minutes' promenade?" he asked, after a waltz. "I've got something awful p'tickler to say to you, you know. Tell you the truth, I came here expressly to see you—did, 'pon my word."

Olga acknowledged his compliment with an amused smile, and took his arm.

"It's awful delicate, you know," he continued, pulling his moustache with his disengaged hand; "but you're such an awfully clever woman, you know——"

"That you are unlikely to be misunderstood," said Olga, helping him over the ground.

"That's exactly the idea. Well, you know, Cuthbert, my manager at the Universe, was saying what an awful lot of money you might make."

Olga raised her head with awakened interest.

"Of course, money is nothing to you," he continued,

uneasily, catching the change in her expression, and doubting the prudence of going further.

"But it is a great deal to me. I wish to make more money."

"Do you, though? I thought it was fame and that sort of thing you were going for, you know. You can make both, and help me out of a p'tickerlarly awkward hole at the same time, if the means are not awfully distasteful, you know."

"Tell me the means. I promise I will not take offense at any *convenable* proposal."

"Thanks, awfully. This is the idea—it's a big idea—it's mine, at least, it's my manager's. You know you made that new magazine, and you saved the Orpheonic from an awful smash. Now, we thought if you would sing at the Universe——"

"That is a music hall, is it not?"

"Yes, but it's an awful big 'un. Let me explain before you refuse. The circumstances would be altogether exceptional—your name would not appear, and your identity could only be guessed at."

"I cannot see how that is possible, if I am to sing before the audience."

"I'm coming to that. Cuthbert started the idea, you know. He proposed that should we get a lady as nearly like you in figure as possible, set her to learn some Russian songs of a lively kind, dress her just as you are dressed and send her on in a mask."

"A *loup*?"

"Yes; one of those half-velvet affairs, you know. He proposed to bill the hoardings with portraits and advertise the singer as the masked lady, and lead the public to suspect it was you in a new character. It struck me as being a big idea, but not quite a gentlemanly sort of thing, you know. And then, where are we to find a lady who looks like you, and can sing Russian? Then it occurred to me (and here's where my idea comes in, you know) that you yourself might do it—of course choosing the songs. Nobody could say it was you, and you would do more justice to yourself than if a vulgar party personified you. You're not offended are you, Mrs. Dunbar? I should be awfully sorry if——"

"Have you mentioned this to any one?" Olga asked, interrupting him.

"Not a soul. I suppose I ought to have spoken first to Dunbar?"

"If I entertain the idea it will be upon the condition that no one in the world knows it; not even my husband." She paused, with a horrible feeling of repugnance.

"Oh, I bind myself to secrecy. Cuthbert shall not know—not a soul in the show; nor out of it. As for the terms, you shall have three or four times as much as the Albert Hall can pay——"

"But how often am I to appear?"

"As often as you can. Once or twice only if you choose. It's a big advertisement we want, you know."

"I will think of it. Send me your card."

A fortnight after this, the Right Hon. called at Grandison Chambers. He found Lesley alone.

"Where is Mrs. Dunbar?" he asked.

"She is at Lady Hammerton's."

"May I ask why you are not there?"

"Ladies only are invited. The object is to found a Home for women."

"Then you are at liberty this evening?"

"Quite."

"I want you to go to the Universe Music Hall."

"For what purpose, sir?"

"You have seen the advertisement in the daily papers?"

"Yes."

"And the colored bill on the hoardings?"

"Yes."

"Do you know who the masked lady is supposed to represent?"

"My wife; there can be no doubt about that. The figure, the dress, the pose, everything has been studiously copied and very cleverly depicted, it seems to me," Lesley said, with a laugh.

The Right Hon. inclined his head.

"Every one sees the personification. What are you going to do about it?"

"Nothing," Lesley answered, contemptuously, "It's an advertising venture—nothing more. It can do us no possible harm."

"I am of a contrary opinion. The advertisement is intended to provoke public curiosity, and draw a lot of inquisitive fools to the house. As Lord Heckerly is concerned in it, there may possibly be betting upon it. If the

belief prevails that it is Mrs. Dunbar, the effect upon me will, at least, be most unpleasant. I am sorry that you fail to see any objection to this vulgar exhibition."

"Because the exhibition is vulgar the masked lady cannot be identified with Olga. It is impossible that any one can be found to represent her as those hoarding pictures do. Any good artist could produce a recognizable portrait of my wife and hide her face with a mask. But not a woman in the world can reproduce in person her voice, her grace, her——"

"You had better go and see if it is possible," the Right Hon. said dryly, interrupting Lesley. "These people would not have incurred such expense without good reason. If they have found any one who can inspire a belief that she is Mrs. Dunbar, legal means must be taken to stop the exhibition. You will please me by testing the justice of your opinion."

"Certainly, if you wish it, I will spend the evening at the music hall," said Lesley. And an hour later he paid for a seat and strolled into the stalls of the Universe.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

TRICKED BY HIS WIFE.

THE front row of stalls were full ; the performance had commenced. After a glance at the crowded stage, where a ballet was being played, Lesley leant forward and looked at the programme that lay on the marble slab before him. On the illuminated cover was a reproduction of the hoarding picture. It was strikingly like his wife, despite the mask which concealed three parts of her face.

"Fetching, ain't it?" said the man occupying the next stall.

Lesley affected not to hear that the observation was addressed to him. That description, applied to one so like Olga, offended his ear. He took up the programme and opened it as he leant back. On one page in large type was an announcement—"The masked lady this even-

ing." On the next a list of the other performers. As he turned to the last page to see what place the masked lady took in the entertainment, his neighbor chuckled. Lesley turned. The neighbor, a stout, middle-aged man, with a waxed mustache, and a very large diamond stud, met his look with a twinkling eye, and gave another chuckle.

"Trying to find out when the masked lady is to come on," said he. "That's what nobody can find out—what I can't find out, and I'm more likely to be in the know than most of 'em. If I *had* known it 'tain't likely I should have come for this sort of thing." He indicated the ballet with a jerk of his cigar and a long whiff of smoke to wards the stage.

"What do people come to this place for?" Lesley asked, reflectively.

"Novelty—that's what the B. P. comes for. Give anything for a bit of new. Look at 'em—they are sick of the ballet before the Amazons are on. And as soon as the next number begins they'll be looking at the programme to see what follows. It's a stroke of luck if they get a bit of new once a year, but if it's to be got we must get it, cost what it will. Now this masked lady, I don't know what to make of it." He took up the programme and regarded it doubtfully. "She may be a hit. They're working it remarkably well. Don't say what she's to do when she's to come on, or whether she's to be in the bill again."

"Why should there be a secret about it?"

"That's a bit of the fake—shovelling up the mystery, don't you see? Is it this Mrs. Dunbar, who is taking all the cake, or ain't it? That's what they want all the papers to ask to-morrow morning, that's the bait they mean to draw the Johnnies in here with. I know one thing, however—if it is Mrs. Dunbar I'll have her in my pantomime next year."

"With the kind permission of Mr. Dunbar," suggested Lesley.

"Oh, he don't count. Not a bit. Who's Mr. Dunbar? Was a clever woman ever kept in hand by her husband. Look at our stars—there's Mrs.—Hallo?" he broke off, abruptly. "What's on next?"

The curtain had fallen on the ballet. The babble of sounds was hushed as the title disappeared from the il-

luminated space in the side of the proscenium, where the numbers were announced, followed by a hum of voices as the words, "The Masked Lady," were exhibited.

"The masked lady's up," exclaimed Lesley's neighbor, focussing his opera glass. "Now we shall see if it's all fake or the real thing."

Despite his conviction that the performance was "all fake," Lesley quivered with nervous apprehension as the curtain rose and the band struck up. He recognized Olga's favorite romance in the first bar of the symphony. He started involuntarily as the masked lady came on to the stage. He *knew* it was Olga! Could he, who had studied the charms of that figure with more than an artist's adoration, mistake another for her? There was a memory in every line of that supple form and those round, white arms; in every curve of neck and throat. Not a line was there which was unknown to him; not one known line which was not there. Only in one woman could all those charms be thus harmoniously blended, and that one was Lesley's wife!

"It's a wonderful good make up, anyhow," observed the neighbor, examining the masked lady through his glass. "A wonderful good make up."

Not the faintest momentary hope was aroused in Lesley's mind by this suggestion. If he could have disbelieved the evidence of his eyes, his ears and reason would have convinced him that the singer was Olga. The romance she had chosen for this performance was called "The Three Ages of Woman," and represented in turn a coy maiden, a mother, and an old woman. It required more dramatic action than Olga had chosen to exhibit in public, and for that reason Lesley alone had heard her sing it.

"Mrs. Dunbar or not, she's first-class, eh?" said the neighbor, after the first verse.

"Too good for the halls. Fetch all London in pantomime," he said, after the second.

Lesley sat stupefied, bewildered in his stall, until the song was ended; then instinctively, rather than with any set purpose, he rose to seek his wife.

"You're not going now. She's bound to come on again. Sit down," said the neighbor.

But taking no notice of him or the remonstrance of others whom he had to pass, Lesley pushed his way along

the row of applauding spectators, and reached the lobby

"Which way do the singers leave the hall?" he stammered, addressing an attendant.

"The artistes' entrance is at the back, in Beaufort Street."

He hurried round to the stage door, and would have passed the keeper's wicket, but a policeman stopped him.

"No one allowed to enter except on business, sir," he said, sharply.

"I have business."

"You must send up your card, sir. Strict orders to let no one in we don't know."

Lesley hesitated. A door at the end of the passage opened, and a faint strain of distant music came through. He recognized another of Olga's songs. She had accepted the encore. What good would it do to send his card. It would only add to the scandal if he betrayed his feelings before the world. "I will wait here," he said.

"Must go outside, sir. Can't allow any one to wait here."

Lesley went out without a word. A fly was waiting before the door for his wife. He posted himself on the kerb, keeping his eyes fixed on the stage doors, striving to realize his position and concentrate his thoughts into practical form, and all the while the air of "The Three Ages" ran over and over through his mind as if that were the one thing to be thought of.

Half a dozen idlers collected about the door. At last it opened, and the policeman bustling out dispelled the idlers, who fell back reluctantly, leaving an open space from the door to the fly. Lesley alone stood his ground silently, and refused to move aside. Then the door opened again, and *she* came out, still masked, with a dust cloak covering her dress and a fur muffling her throat and the lower part of her face. Her hand rested on the arm of the stage manager, Cuthbert; Lesley only recognized that she was escorted by a gentleman in evening dress. He stepped forward and met them face to face.

"Let me pass, please," said Cuthbert, quietly pushing forward. But Lesley stood his ground, blocking the way.

"That is my wife," he said.

The manager turned to the masked lady, and as she shook her head in denial, he said—

"You are mistaken, sir; this lady is not your wife."

"Would to God she were not!" said Lesley, fervently, still stopping the way.

The manager nodded to the policeman who stepped briskly forward, and would have forced Lesley to move aside, but the masked lady, stopping him with a gesture, pushed up her mask and looked Lesley boldly in the face. It was not Olga! The cloak and fur had deceived him for the moment, but now he saw that the figure was not Olga's.

"Are you satisfied?" asked the manager, as Lesley turned away.

"I have been tricked," he said—"tricked by my wife," he added, bitterly, to himself.

He had been tricked. Lord Heckerly looking through the screen of his private box at the enthusiastic audience as Olga left the stage, caught sight of Lesley making his way out of the stalls, and recognized his white face. He left his box instantly and ran down the side stairs to the stage just as Olga was going on to sing again. It was too late to speak to her now. While she was on the stage he had time to concert a plan for hoodwinking her husband, who, beyond doubt, intended to claim his wife. He was at the wings to meet her as she came off.

"Awfully sorry, but I must trouble you to come this way," he said, as he gave her his arm and led her towards the private staircase. Dropping his voice as they passed a knot of professionals not less curious than the general public to know who the masked lady was, he added, "Your husband is in the house."

Olga was not unprepared for this announcement. She had not recognized her husband's face in the crowded house; but since accepting the engagement her constant dread of a climax had been augmented by a growing belief, superstitious rather than logical, that this desperate enterprise would betray her. Nevertheless, the sudden shock of discovery unnerved her completely.

"Don't be frightened, Mrs. Dunbar," said Heckerly, feeling the twitch of her hand upon his arm. "I've arranged everything. He's waiting at the stage door. I've got a chorus girl about your height wrapped in a cloak and fur. Cuthbert will take her down to your fly, and if Mr. Dunbar questions them, she will unmask and convince him that it was not you who sang."

Incapable of reflection, almost of volition, Olga suffered

herself to be guided. She entered Heckerly's screened box, and at his request took off her mask and gave it up. It was not until he had left her and was beyond recall that she recognized the shame, and the folly as well, in this last act of deception.

"Am I losing all sense of love and honor," she asked herself, in desperation, "that I can connive with these music-hall people in cheating my husband and exposing him to ridicule? Could I have done this same disgraceful thing a month ago? Is he a fool to be imposed upon by such a palpable trick? What must he think of me—how can I face him now?"

It was too late now to retreat. The only possible means of escape was to persevere in the course she had taken and play the desperate game out boldly. With this consciousness she hardened herself to resist the undermining effects of remorse, and tried to persuade herself that she was merely playing a part in which to succeed she must forget her real existence, like any other actress.

When Heckerly returned to the box he found Olga standing where he had left her, in the dark angle at the back, motionless and white as marble. His lordship was cheerfully elated with the success of his scheme, which seemed to him to furnish a first-class idea for a farcical sketch; it did not occur to him that there was also material in it for a tragedy—that sort of thing being out of his line.

"It's all right," he said. "My brougham's at the front of the house. We can get out unnoticed by the extra exit. Cuthbert has orders to hold on till he gets the signal that it's all right. Come on."

He took her down, then put her in the brougham, and closed the door—Olga declining further escort.

"Grandison Mansions?" he asked through the window.

"No; Lady Hammerton's, Russell Square," she replied.

He gave instructions to the driver, and returning to the window put an envelope in Olga's hand, asking her to drop him a line and say how she got on. Olga hardly knew what he said, her whole being absorbed in the possibility of escape. Drawn back in the corner of the carriage, she scarcely dared look towards the window for fear of encountering the eyes of her husband. She drew a long breath of relief when the brougham rattled off and joined the stream of vehicles. Almost unconsciously she

had taken the envelope and slipped it in the pocket of her muff, and it was entirely forgotten by the time she recovered her self-possession. It was half-past ten when she arrived at Lady Hammerton's. By the time Lesley called for her she had regained perfect mastery over her faculties and thrown herself into the part she had to play. He was not surprised to find her there—that was part of the trick, and he made no inquiry which might lead to a further effort to deceive him. But her self-composure and vivacity astounded him. Was it possible, he asked himself, that she had been party to the imposition played upon him?

When the hansom that took them home left Russell Square, he said—

“Olga, have you anything to tell me?”

“Oh, so much!” she replied, with vivacity. “The queer women who are the most active in this scheme, and their views about ‘our mission,’ ‘our duties’ and ‘our rights’ are quite too droll for ordinary conception. I must tell you all about them;” and then, with marvellous ability, she narrated all she had heard of the meeting which had broken up before her arrival, and as if the particulars came from her own observation.

Lesley listened in silence, finding it more and more impossible to conceive that deception could be carried to such lengths.

“It has given me a headache,” she said, when they reached home; “I shall go to my room now. Are you coming, dear?”

“No. I shall sit up for another hour.” Lesley retained her hand, looking with intense earnestness into her face, and then again he asked, “Have you nothing more to tell me?”

“Not to-night, dear,” she answered, with a laugh—“to-morrow.”

He paused a moment longer, and then, giving way to the impulse of his heart, he caught her in his arms and strained her to his breast.

Such love as this was cheaply bought at the sacrifice of a little self-esteem, Olga thought as she clung to him; and to retain such love she would dare more than all she had yet attempted.

No, he could not believe that this darling of his soul could utter and act such falsehood. Oh, it was easier a

thousand times to believe that his senses had been cheated by a cunning actress than that his wife was a treacherous liar !

"After all," he said to himself, as he swiftly closed the door after Olga and returned to the fireside, "was it even improbable that two women should exist with like physical aspects? And given two persons identical in form, must not their vocal organs be alike?" He himself knew two brothers whose voices were so similar that with one's eyes shut it was impossible to tell which was speaking.

His inclination led him on to multiply instances and reasons in support of a theory to upset another which had stunned him by its seeming incredibility.

It was an enormous relief to believe this—comparable only to grasping the living hand of some dearest friend who has been reported dead. He lit a cigar and leant against the chimneypiece, building up his loyal and generous theory, nobly blind to its weakness and defects. Never before had a weed seemed so delightful. No sound broke his meditation, save an occasional rustle in the adjoining room—a happy evidence that she, his love and pride and joy, was there close to him. His eyes fell on her muff, which had fallen from the chair where she had placed it on coming in. He stepped across and picked it up tenderly, as if it were part of her. Then he noticed an envelope lying on the floor where the muff had been. The flap was open. He turned it over.

There was no address. Curious ! How had it come there ? What was inside it ? Whom did it belong to ? A circular that had found its way there by accident—or what ?

Leaning against the chimneypiece once more, and slowly smoking, he turned the letter about with the playful curiosity which is of that kind of trifling a man gives way to after a severe mental strain. Finally he opened the flap, slipped in a couple of fingers, and drew out a folded sheet of plain paper.

"A check, of all things in the world !" he said to himself, in astonishment, as he opened the folded paper and took out of it the slip. He opened the check next and read it :—

"Pay Mrs. Lesley Dunbar or order the sum of one hundred guineas.

"CHARLES LESTER."

CHAPTER XXXIV.

CONFESSION.

LESLEY stood for some minutes, looking at that colored scrap of paper in sheer bewilderment. Then the blood rushed to his face as this damning evidence of his wife's secret dealing provoked a suspicion more horrible than any yet aroused by her inexplicable conduct. Who was the man from whom she had accepted this sum of money, and what had she bartered for it?

The cigar had slipped from his nerveless fingers and was burning the woolen rug. He ground it under his feet in savage fury ; then he strode towards his wife's room, to confront her with this accusing check. But at the door he stopped, terrified by the enormity of the charge he had to make. Such a charge was not to be made in the first moments of passion. He resolved to defer it till the morning that if explanation were possible he might find it for himself without exposing her to the humiliation of rebutting an infamous accusation.

The fire burnt low, he did not attempt to replenish it. It went out, and still he sat before the black cinders, shivering with cold and mental excitement. At length when sounds in the kitchen told him that the night had come, to an end, he went into his own room, and throwing himself down on the couch fell asleep, exhausted with the vain efforts to exculpate the woman he loved.

Olga found him thus when she entered the room. She watched him for some minutes with the dread misgiving in her heart which had sprung up when she woke and found he was not by her side ; then she fetched a rug and covered him so gently that it failed to wake him. She ordered breakfast to be kept back till she rang for it, and returned to her room to change the dressing-gown she had hurriedly thrown on for her morning dress. As she returned to the sitting-room, some ten minutes later Lesley was entering it by the opposite door. He looked

so haggard and wan and joyless—so unlike himself that she halted on the threshold with an exclamation of distressed astonishment.

"Lesley, what is the matter?" she asked, advancing quickly towards him. He stopped her with a gesture, unable to speak. "What is it, dearest?" she asked again, imploringly.

"Charles Lester!" he said, the words coming hoarsely from his parched throat.

"Charles Lester!" she repeated, in wonder. "Who is he, dear?"

"That is it. Who is Charles Lester?"

"I do not know," she answered, softly shaking her head in amazement. "I do not think I ever heard the name before."

"You never heard the name before?" he said, advancing within arms' reach of her, and speaking with terrible earnestness.

Olga took a moment to reflect, and then replied, with perfect assurance—

"No, Lesley, to the best of my knowledge, I never heard the name before."

Looking down into her unflinching eyes he said to himself that a woman who could lie with such an appearance of candor was capable of anything of the worst deception a woman could put upon her husband.

But, indeed, she was guiltless of falsehood in this. Her astonishment was quite unfeigned. She knew nothing of the contents of that envelope Heckerly had put in her hand—had forgotten it entirely; and was quite ignorant that for business connected with the music hall he had a separate banking account in the name of Charles Lester.

Lesley, still looking in his wife's face, drew the envelope from his pocket and put the check in her hand.

"Perhaps that will help your memory," he said, harshly.

It did help her memory. The envelope awakened her recollection. The sum on the check—a hundred guineas—convinced her that this was the payment for her performance. She dropped her hand and lifted her eyes to Lesley's face in speechless dismay.

"You do know Charles Lester," he said, fiercely—her countenance convicting her in his mind.

"I know who this is from—yes," she faltered, faintly.

"Then tell me what that payment is for?"

She sank down in the chair beside her, and covered her face with her hands.

"Tell me," he repeated, steadying himself by laying his hand on the table. "Tell me and put an end to this damnable business. I command a confession."

She dared not tell him that she had cheated him.

"Quick. I will not give you time to find a lie. Speak," he said with rising fury.

"It is payment for singing at the Universe last night," she faltered.

"You own to that. It is something. You saw me in the house and sent the man and girl down to play with me. After that confession it will be easy to tell the rest. What else—was the man Charles Lester—?"

With her head still bowed, she spread out her trembling hands in silent supplication for mercy. But there was no mercy in his heart now. His wife was a liar. He could believe nothing. It was foolish to expect a true statement of the limits of her guilt.

"Give me your keys," he said.

She was too overcome by the sense of her own offence to resent the indignity of this demand; she merited any punishment he might choose to inflict. Without hesitation she gave him her keys. He balanced them in his hand for a moment, and then tossed them on the table.

"Do not spare me; search my desk, my boxes—all," she said.

"It is useless. You would not have given me your keys so readily had there been anything to find."

"Oh, Lesley, have pity on me. You do not know how I was pressed. I was compelled to get money. It was not lightly done—not to gratify my own caprices. You might know that it was not mere womanly extravagance that led me on."

"Yes; if I had not been such a fool as to believe your word," he paused; then suddenly continued, "If the money was not for yourself, who was it for?"

"For my grandfather," she replied, suddenly inspired with an idea for evading yet again the terrible confession. "He has written to me; he is in need."

She stopped, the lie choking her as she read the scorn in his face. He turned upon his heel without a word,

and there was not a sound as Mrs. Gough brought in the letters. A glance at her master and mistress showed that it was not a time to talk about breakfast. She laid the letters in the usual place on the side table, and left the room quickly.

Olga looked across at the pile with swift apprehension, and rose from her chair.

"Wait," said Lesley. "I will give you your letters," adding, as he took them up, "when I have seen what is inside them."

CHAPTER XXXV.

UNRAVELLING THE KNOT.

LESLEY took up a knife from the table to open the envelope of the letter before him. Olga started to her feet and arrested him, catching the blade in her open hand and holding it so that if he moved it he must cut her flesh.

"Lesley, you will not do that!" she exclaimed.

"Why not?"

"Because it is shameful for a man to open his wife's letters—and I am your wife!"

"You have made me forget it," he said bitterly.

They stood in that strange attitude, silent for a moment, she clasping the blade of the knife, he the handle; then he spoke—

"I must know the truth. If you will not tell it I must find it out for myself."

"Not that way. I have wronged you, but I will not let you wrong yourself."

"You speak as if you were the guardian of my honor," he said contemptuously.

"I am," she retorted. "Your honor is dearer to me than my own self-respect."

He pointed with his disengaged hand to the check she had dropped upon the floor.

"Yes; even that degradation I except from love of you." Not heeding the smile of derision that disfigured his face, she continued, "Since you made me your wife

every thought and action of my life has been directed by love of you."

"And you cannot tell me who that man is?" he said, pointing again to the check.

Olga started as if she had been lashed with a whip.

"What do you mean?" she gasped, catching the drift of his thoughts as much by the kindling jealousy in his eyes as from his words, "Oh, you cannot mean that—no, no!"

He dropped the handle of the knife and turned away in silence, absorbed by the conviction that he had dishonored himself by suspecting his wife of that unnamed offence. The expression in her face was unequivocal. He saw that jealousy had blinded him and misguided his reason.

"Who Charles Lester is I do not know," she continued, in a tone of forced calm. "I was to be paid a hundred guineas by Lord Heckerly for my engagement at his music hall; he put an envelope into my hands last night. I know no more than that. Look in my face, Lesley, and read the truth of what I say."

"I believe what you tell me," said Lesley, with contrition in his voice.

She turned away to conceal the tears of shame that had sprung into her eyes. Then, repressing her emotion by a great effort, she faced him again, saying—

"The end has come. I can go no further. I have trampled down my pride, sacrificed my self-esteem, hardened my heart, and almost forgotten my womanhood to lie to you and cheat you. It is no use. I cannot keep my secret. You must know all and suffer with me."

She put her quivering hands on the table for support as she endeavored to collect her ideas, and rested for a moment in silence. Then rapidly glancing through the scattered pile of letters, she picked out two.

"These letters may tell all the story" she said. "I will read them to you."

Lesley waited in wondering suspense as she opened the first, and ran through the contents before reading it aloud.

"Yes," she said. "This tells a great deal." She read—

"BEATRICE TERRACE, WHITECHAPEL ROAD.

"MADAM,—My husband wishes me to inform you that he can no longer be put off with small payments. It was understood at first that we would take a hundred pounds a fortnight to begin with, but must have the whole amount of ten thousand before

the end of six months. Time is going on, and Mr. Parker says that if two hundred is not paid up by Wednesday he shall apply to the Right Hon. Mr. Dunbar.

"Your obedient servant,
"JANE PARKER."

Olga handed the letter without comment to Lesley, and while he endeavored by reading it to himself to comprehend its fuller meaning, she opened the next letter, which she had rightly concluded was from her grandfather. It was dated Calais, and written in English, obviously by another amanuensis.

"MY DEAR CHILD" (he began).—"I have received no reply to the letter I sent you from Hamburg; nor have I heard any information concerning you, except such public items as my secretary has gleaned from the English papers in the *Circle* here and elsewhere. Nevertheless, I know you are in trouble, and must be nearly at the last extremity for need of that help and guidance which only the parent can supply. From the beginning I foresaw that you would not be able to go on without me, and you must remember that I promised to come to your assistance whenever you asked for it. Why have you not done so? Is it folly or is it pride? Do you trust entirely in Providence, or do you choose to rely upon your own unaided efforts for escape from the difficulties that beset you? In either case I pity you. In addition to sympathy, your condition excites my serious anxiety. Since I refused to pay anything in the form of blackmail to the Parkers, or entertain their ridiculous proposals (except for my amusement), they have ceased to communicate personally with me or by letter. But their scheme was really good, for persons of their limited capacities, and I cannot believe they would abandon it except for some venture promising greater advantages; and, so, as I have not heard of their being sent to jail yet (from the English police intelligence which I have read to me carefully every morning, I cannot encourage this hope. I am morally certain, therefore, that they are preying upon your weakness, and have every reason to be satisfied with the result. Advertisements and Photographs concerning you in the papers show that you are making frantic efforts to get money, and resorting to means which must be distasteful to your husband. All that money I know goes into the Parkers' pockets. It is deplorable to think of such waste. But that sort of thing cannot go on long. I know the Parkers. They are like those beasts whose appetites once sharpened by the taste of blood lose all sense of danger, and regard nothing but the satisfaction of their lust. Their own imprudence will lead them to destruction, and you will be involved in their fate.

"This consideration, my child, impels me to come to your assistance without delay. I shall leave here to-morrow morning, and shall probably arrive in London in the afternoon. In a very few hours I shall make it impossible for the Parkers to trouble

you any more ; and you may safely expect to suffer no more anxiety on their account. I write this lengthy letter to prepare you for my visit, and you will let your husband know that parental feeling has overcome the resentment which your undutiful conduct in marrying contrary to my wish occasioned.

"Your most affectionate grandfather.

IVAN ZASSOULITCH."

If that letter had come an hour earlier it might have changed Olga's destiny ; it was too late now. Nothing could shake her resolution to put an end to the course of deception which had led Lesley to doubt the one virtue she possessed.

Lesley was waiting impatiently to hear more—a glimmering of the truth having dawned on him. He snatched up the second letter eagerly as Olga laid it on the table.

"I see it all," he cried, his face flushing with joy before he had got half through the letter. "The blackmail these wretches have levied, and the ridiculous proposals your grandfather rejected, have reference to the robbery at Pangbourne."

"They were not ridiculous," Olga said, bowing her head mournfully.

"Not to you, my poor Olga."

"Read to the end," she said, recoiling as he approached her.

He ran through the rest of the letter, and finished it with an exclamation of fervent gratitude.

"I see it clearly," he said. "The Parkers threatened to support the unjust accusation my father brought against you." Seeing the expression of hopeless resignation in Olga's face unchanged, he stopped, his voice dropping from joy to deep remorse, and added, "Oh, Olga, my wife, can you forgive me?"

He would have taken her hand, but again she drew back.

"The accusation your father brought against us is not untrue," she said.

He looked at her in mute amazement ; but nothing in her face encouraged him to hope that she was prevaricating. Passionless, inflexible, cold truth was in every line of those sad, beautiful features.

"You do not know what you say," he gasped at length.

"It may be that your father has not told you all ; if not, you shall hear the truth from me. You say he has brought an accusation against me—what is it?"

"I cannot repeat it; it is too horrible; it is monstrous."

"If it were not, why should I have done so much that is monstrous to conceal it from you? Did he tell you I was a thief? It is true. I am a thief. The very name you knew me by is stolen."

"Stop?" he cried, with the futility of one who raises his hand to defend himself against the fall of an avalanche. "I cannot believe you."

"You have believed worse than that of me, Lesley," she answered, with mournful reproach.

He looked at her with wild incredulity. It was easier when his reason was clouded with jealousy to doubt her fidelity than now to believe the woman he loved capable of sordid crime.

"You a thief!" he exclaimed, shaking his head derisively. "It is impossible!"

"Must I lie to be believed? If I say that I am innocent, will you believe me?"

"I tell you again you do not know what you are saying. You are under the influence of some emotional illusion—some mental strain produced by the persecution of these infamous wretches ; and by the not less infamous suspicion of my jealous imagination. It is not real."

"That is real enough," she said, pointing to Jane Parker's letter.

"But their power over you is baseless. What can they prove against you?"

"All that our enemies have said against us."

"What then? I will still believe my wife rather than her enemies."

As she regarded him in silence, there was loving recognition of his loyalty in her eyes.

"It is useless," she said, shaking her head sadly ; "the evidence is too strong even for steadfast love to resist. Little by little your faith would break away, and you must love me less and less until no faith or love remained, then you could only despise me, as I despise myself, for playing this base part. It is better to confess all now. With no motive for telling you a falsehood, I say again I am a thief."

"I must have evidence to believe that," Lesley said, with a desperate clinging to hope.

"I will give it. You have not told me what my enemies have said against me. I will tell you the true history of my life. If these two accounts agree, you can no longer doubt that I am guilty of dishonesty."

Without exaggerating her faults or seeking to exonerate herself, but briefly and clearly she narrated the events of her life, from the time she first learnt that her father and grandfather were implicated in the Radozski robbery, to the mutual agreement with her grandfather when they separated at Victoria. Lesley would hear no more. Her revelation of the means by which Olga had become his wife—the fraud deliberately arranged between her and old Zassoulitch seemed to him as monstrous and impossible as the part she had taken in robbing Major Caldecott.

"Your grandfather will be here to-day. I will believe nothing till I have seen him. I will not hear another word, for if this statement is untrue it should not be made; if it is true"—he paused, looking at her with horror—"then I could only wish never again to hear you speak to me."

He left her and went out into the street in mad haste, as if the threatened evil were one to be escaped by flight.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

A BARGAIN.

In those parting words of Lesley's, Olga heard her own death knell; for what did those words imply but that he wished her dead if she were guilty of what she had confessed. She was guilty, and if he loved her no more, she had nothing left to live for. This reflection seemed to paralyze her, and for hour after hour she scarcely moved from the place where Lesley had left her. For her there was no hope of escape now. But when she heard his key in the door she rose quickly and withdrew into her room, feeling that her punishment had already begun.

Lesley had resolved that until further corroboration was forthcoming he would not believe his wife's statement, despite the damning evidence she had given; nevertheless he did not attempt to seek her. He tried to distract his thoughts by reading; it was impossible. He lit a cigar, and threw it away at the second whiff. The greater part of the dragging afternoon he spent in pacing up and down the room—from time to time glancing at the timepiece, and listening, sick at heart, for the arrival of Zassoulitch. At length, about five o'clock, the door bell tingled; Lesley himself strode out of the room to answer it. Zassoulitch was outside with his attendant.

"Is Mrs. Lesley Dunbar at home?" he asked as the door opened.

"I am here. My name is Lesley Dunbar. Come in."

Zassoulitch bowed in silence, and, as if from a grand impulse, boldly offered his hand. Resolved to believe in the man's honesty to the last, Lesley took it.

The old man had preserved his soldierly appearance, and was magnificent in a fur coat and brand new silk hat.

"You will permit my secretary to leave me for ten minutes Mr. Dunbar?" he said.

Lesley acquiesced, and when the secretary was dismissed, led Zassoulitch into the inner room.

Olga had come from her chamber on catching the sound of her grandfather's voice, and stood, cold and impassive, with one hand on the table, facing them as they entered. Not a word, not a movement, betrayed her presence to the old man, who, still holding Lesley's hand, paused before seating himself in the chair placed for him, and said—

"I conclude, from the manner in which you have received me, Mr. Dunbar, that my grandchild had prepared you for this visit."

"Yes."

"She has told you that I have forgiven her and I have only to add that in forgiving her I forgive you, my son;" he relinquished Lesley's hand after a last magnanimous shake, and seated himself. "Yes," he continued, slowly unbuttoning his splendid coat; "affection is stronger than pride, and I am not ashamed to own it. Yet if any one a week ago had told me that I could overlook that

act of disobedience and defiance with which Olga crowned the shame heaped upon my white head by your father—that after these months of silence I should write to her in a spirit of forgiveness and love——”

“My husband knows all,” said Olga, in a clear and measured tone.

The old man started at the sound of her voice and this unexpected interruption, but he showed himself not in the least discountenanced by her announcement.

“I am delighted to hear it, my child,” he said, complacently; “especially as your husband knowing all, is clearly not displeased to see me here,”

“I know nothing,” said Lesley. “Olga has made a statement which I refuse to believe without convincing proof. I welcome you in the hope that you may disprove her statement.”

“I shall be most happy to disprove anything, my son, which endangers the amiable relations which should exist between the several members of one family. Tell me what my unhappy grandchild has stated.”

“She has told me that you were convicted and sent to Siberia—not for a political offence, but for a theft.”

“Poor Olga!” interrupted Zassoulitch in a tone of pity, with a melancholy shake of the head.

“That you entered into partnership with the Parkers to rob the people who gave you hospitality.”

“Misguided girl!”

“And that she aided you in stealing the diamond from Major Caldecott.”

The old man raised his hands and let them fall heavily on his knees.

“And last of all,” pursued Lesley with difficulty, “that you together deliberately laid the plans by which I was tricked into making her my wife.”

“Is it possible!” exclaimed Zassoulitch, rolling his sightless eyes to heaven, as he clasped his hands. “Well, Mr. Dunbar, what conclusion did you come to when she had told you all this?”

“I wish to believe that it is nothing but hallucination on the part of my wife. Some form of cerebral derangement brought on by excessive physical and mental excitement.” Lesley’s tone of confidence broke down, and he halted and faltered over the last words as he looked at Olga, whose still, impassive face belied his theory.

Zassoulitch listened with approving nods and smiles. Patting his hands softly at the conclusion, he said—

“That is the very best thing you can believe, my son. You couldn’t have hit upon a better explanation. Cerebral derangement will account for anything.”

“Did you steal the diamond between you?” Lesley asked, fiercely.

“My son, my son, this is not so wise,” said Zassoulitch, in a tone of gentle reproof. “Could you expect a man, innocent or guilty, to answer ‘yes’ to such a question?”

“Answer me one way or the other. Yes or no,” Lesley said with gathering fury.

“Well, if you will have it—no,” replied the old man with a sigh. “If I give any other answer it might be thought that the whole family was suffering from cerebral derangement. Be reasonable. Don’t ride a good horse to death: give me credit for having my wits about me. It’s quite sufficient for our present purpose—which is to get as much good out of this little family council as possible—to agree that Olga is the victim of hallucination. Even in that we must not outstretch reasonable limits. Her fears are not entirely the result of mental derangement. The family honor is in jeopardy, and I have come to save it.”

Lesley threw himself in a chair, set his elbows on his knees, and dropping his chin in his hands, looked from the old man to his wife, no longer doubting their guilt, too horrified for compassion. This was his wife; that her father—tricksters both: thieves and liars with whom his own life now was bound by an inseparable tie.

Olga felt his merciless eye upon her, but she made no sign; her heart also was numbed by this crushing shame. She had been told by those who had been under the knout that after a certain number of strokes they ceased to feel the lash that tore their flesh. She believed that this was now her condition, and that having borne the worst she could take the rest of her punishment with callous indifference.

“Your silence, my children,” pursued Zassoulitch, maintaining with cynical audacity a tone of paternal mildness and reproof, “seems to intimate that you do not sufficiently value my intercession on behalf of the family. But let us see what you can do without it. The Parkers have drawn a considerable amount of money from you.

Probably they have got the last penny they can possibly extort. But that will not satisfy them. People of that kind never know when to stop. You have most unwisely shown them that the information they possess is valuable, and when they find that the last drop of blood is sucked out of you, they will look about for another victim. In all probability, my son, they will try what they can do with your Right Hon. father. He is an exceedingly clever man, and it is easy to see the course he will take with these stupidly cunning persons: he will listen calmly to all they have to tell, possibly pumping them dry with delusive suggestions; then when they proposed to keep their knowledge secret on payment of a certain sum, he will write out the address of his solicitor, and refer them to him for a settlement. That will be quite enough: the Parkers will trouble him no more. Black Bogey is not more terrible to children than the name of a solicitor to persons of the Parker type. But they will not be satisfied. Who can they attack next? They might try Major Caldecott, representing that you, my son, and your Right Hon. father are ignorant of certain facts in your wife's history. Now, the major is not a clever man, and very likely he would pay down something to spare you the pain of exposure. But you couldn't expect him to pay a great deal—certainly not so much as would satisfy the Parkers. Whom could they carry their information to next? Well, my son, their last resource would be the Press. Illiterate as they are they must be aware that certain papers deal in scandals of this kind. Some of the party journals—and notably the *Interviewer*—are extremely hostile to your Right Hon. father, and would risk a great deal to damage him with a sensational revelation of this family secret. Naturally they would not expose themselves to a law-suit by accusing him of complicity in the robbery, but they might very safely leave it to be implied that he knew all about it. They might show, upon the evidence of a man named Phillips and two dealers in secondhand clothing, that we were furnished with clothes and jewellery at the expense of the Parkers on the condition that they should be repaid for the loan when Olga succeeded in obtaining a well-to-do husband; they could show that immediately after the robbery I left the country without restoring the borrowed effects to the Parkers; they could show that I had not a penny piece before the robbery, and that ever since I have

been living very comfortably at Hamburg. They could show that the Parkers have received a large amount of hush money from Mrs. Lesley Dunbar; and, finally, they could show that your Right Hon. father on your marrying my daughter abruptly abandoned the inquiry he had been making with regard to the robbery at the very moment when the intelligent detective declared he could trace the robbery home to me. Every article of this impeachment might be safely made by the *Interviewer*, and considering the position your wife and father hold in society a charge of that kind could not be ignored. It would be discussed in every paper. Silence on our part—I speak as one of that family whose interests are at stake—a silence on our part would be taken as a tacit admission that the charge was true. Only one course would be open to us—we should have to enter an action for libel against the *Interviewer*."

He paused a moment to get his effect, and then continued:—

"On the face of it, such an action looks like a forlorn hope—a desperate attempt—which can only end in disaster. But it isn't, my son, if you accept my help. You would say that the *Interviewer* might snap his fingers at us and be impatient for the trial which is to prove the truth of his charge, and crush us under the weight of overwhelming evidence; but he wouldn't if you will be advised by me. I have shown you the danger in which we stand; it is not to be underrated. Public exposure means the disgrace and ruin of your Right Hon. father, for whom I have the greatest respect; his premature retirement from public life would be a national loss. I need not point out how your own prospects would be blighted, and shall say nothing about the position of your wife. Our name would be sullied, and we should never again be able to lift up our heads in society. Now I will show you the remedy against this evil—the one stroke by which our family is to be saved from dishonor."

Again he paused to enjoy the dramatic situation he had worked up.

"My son, the lost diamond must be returned to Major Caldecott." His fine ear caught the rattle of Lesley's cuff as he dropped his hands with a start of astonishment. "The diamond once restored, we can snap our fingers at the *Interviewer* and all the witnesses he has brought together.

His charge is based on the supposition that we have stolen the diamond. A brief line from the major to say that the diamond has not been stolen and is safely in his possession brings the *Interviewer* down on his knees, and shivering with the prospect of paying the enormous damages claimed, he will insert any apology we like to dictate ; and the family will be more firmly established in the esteem of society than ever it was before."

"Restore the diamond ! I do not understand you," said Lesley, in whose mind the possibility of Zassoulitch becoming honest had not entered.

"It is the one thing to be done. I told Olga so when first the Parkers began to be troublesome, but she neglected my advice, and like a fool, preferred to temporise with the Parkers."

"Where is the diamond ?" Lesley asked.

"That I cannot tell you. But I will undertake to place it in Major Caldecott's possession in four days. It will require some skilful negotiation to get it, but I will exert myself to the utmost in the interests of the family. Naturally I cannot do this unaided. I must have your assistance."

"What am I to do ?"

"Simply find the money to buy the diamond. Your branch of the family is rich. It is a fair division of labor. I find the intelligence ; you the money—fifteen thousand pounds—a trifle to a Cabinet minister."

"I see," Lesley exclaimed, with a short, scornful laugh.

"You wish me to give you this sum of money on your promise to employ it in restoring the diamond to Major Caldecott. Do you think I am a fool ?"

"No, Mr. Dunbar. I think you are an honest English gentleman, and to prove my faith in you I promise to restore the diamond into Major Caldecott's hands upon your simple bond to pay me the money when he and you shall be convinced that the diamond is the same that he lost."

Lesley sprang up without a moment's reflection, and going to the sideboard seized a pen and wrote the bond demanded by Zassoulitch.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

DIVORCE.

THE Right Hon. was at table when his man, bringing in the light pudding with which the minister invariably finished his frugal dinner, said :

"Mr. Lesley Dunbar, sir, is in the library, waiting to see you."

The Right Hon. reflected, as he carefully refilled his glass—he never did anything without deliberation—and answered—

"Ask Mr. Lesley to come up to me, here and now."

He helped himself to the habitual portion and kept his eyes upon the plate, eating with methodical slowness until Lesley had entered the room and closed the door, then he raised his head and cast a penetrating glance at his son.

Lesley had eaten nothing all day ; the long fast and mental agitation together had made him faint and sick ; his temples were beaded with sweat ; his hand was wet and cold ; his hollow eyes, and white, haggard face told their tale.

"Get a glass from the buffet and help yourself to a glass of sherry," said the Right Hon., dropping Lesley's hand.

"I have something very important to say to you, sir," said Lesley disregarding the suggestion.

"I can see you have. Take a glass of sherry. I shall have finished dinner in a few minutes, and can give you all my attention."

Lesley drank a glass of sherry and attempted to eat some brown bread and butter, but the food choked him, and he thrust it aside impatiently as his father laid down the spoon and fork neatly side by side on his plate.

"You went to the Universe Music Hall as I advised, last night," the Right Hon. began.

Lesley who had set his elbow on the table and covered his eyes with his hand, nodded in silence, without changing his attitude.

"And you discovered the fact that the masked lady was——"

"My wife," Lesley muttered, his fingers quivering as he spoke.

"Have you obtained any explanation of that outrageous proceeding?"

"She did it to get money."

"Nevertheless she seems to have been making enough lately by other means to meet all ordinary requirements."

"The Parkers have been levying blackmail."

"She has confessed that?"

"More than that," Lesley replied, dropping his hand heavily on the table and meeting his father's eyes. "She confesses to being in league with the Parkers and to helping her father to rob Caldecott."

The Right Hon. inclined his head, showing neither surprise nor exultation in the corroboration of his suspicions. "And equally, in consequence, she confesses to the fraud by which she made herself your wife?"

"Yes—even that."

"And the Radozski business?"

"Her confession covers every charge you have made against her family and herself."

"You see no motive for her telling a lie in this case?"

"I thought there might be a motive this morning, but since then I have been given evidence which leaves no room for doubt or hope. Zassoulitch—Isaakoff—the grandfather, has confirmed all—everything."

"Am I to understand that he has had the effrontery to show his face here in London?" asked the Right Hon., lowering his brows.

Lesley hurried through the particulars of the interview with Zassoulitch, saying, in conclusion:

"I have given him a bond to pay fifteen thousand pounds if the diamond is returned to Caldecott in four days, and he is now on his way back to Hamburg to get it."

"Fifteen thousand pounds is a large sum," observed the Right Hon., gloomily.

"If he had demanded thrice the amount, I would have agreed to pay it. So long as the diamond is not in the

hands of the major I must feel that it is partly in mine. Of course, sir, you will help me to pay the bond?"

"That depends upon circumstances. It is a very hazardous proceeding to enter into collusion with thieves, and one with which I should have nothing whatever to do personally. If I place this sum of money at your disposal, it will be under certain stringent conditions."

"I will accept any conditions, sir, to be free of this burden."

The Right Hon. inclined his head stiffly. He disapproved of impetuosity, even when it sided with his purpose.

"Has your wife gone to Hamburg, also?" he inquired.

"No."

"Where is she?"

"At home."

The Right Hon. raised his eyebrows.

"What are you going to do with that worthless person?" he asked.

"I haven't thought of that."

"It is quite time you began to think of it. To me that appears a far more important question than how you are to meet a bond given to a thief." He paused, giving Lesley time for reflection.

How were they to live henceforth? Lesley asked himself. Till the last moment possible he had rejected the possibility of her guilt. Since then his mind had been entirely occupied with the means of redeeming her dishonesty. What was to follow, his imagination failed to decide.

After waiting a reasonable time, the Right Hon. broke silence.

"You must get a divorce," he said, decisively.

Lesley started as though he had been struck—the shock of this suggestion restoring vitality to his numbed heart, as a blow converts a piece of dull iron into a magnet, with an attractive and repulsive force.

"A divorce!" he repeated, in a tone of incredulity.

"Surely you have no longer any sentimental attachment to this woman?" said the Right Hon.

Lesley shook his head. He had settled as soon as Zassoulitch had dispelled his doubts about her that his love for Olga was dead, and he believed that this decision was final.

"Then I need not point out to you the practical necessity of this course."

"On what grounds can a divorce be obtained?" Lesley asked, his heart aching with the returning consciousness of Olga's love for him—the passionate devotion she had manifested through all her secret trouble.

"You will leave that to the lawyers. It is sufficient for your own justification that the marriage having been made by fraud is virtually void."

Lesley made no response. He was not convinced. The Right Hon. continued—

"If your eyes had been open, and you had seen this creature as you see her now, would you have made her your wife?"

"No. I could not have done that."

"She knew that, and purposely blinded you for her own sordid ends."

"That cannot be," said Lesley with awakening vigor. "You misjudge her, sir; you forget that she refused the money you offered her."

"No; I recollect perfectly well that very clever *coup de théâtre*. That little piece of acting was cunningly designed to cloak mercenary calculation. I offered half my fortune; why should she accept half, when by waiting some years she might get the benefit of all? She knew I could leave it to no one but my son. Can you believe that the grandfather and granddaughter, in laying their scheme so carefully to hoodwink you, overlooked any single advantage to be got by it?"

If she had cheated him in one way, might she have not done so in another? Lesley asked himself.

"The woman's success in society proves the tendency of her ambition," pursued the Right Hon. "She could only obtain position as your wife; in addition to that she counted upon the reversionary interest in my estate. It was worth a bold stroke to win so much, and she made it—cleverly. Sure of the two birds in the bush she could afford to let go the one she had in hand. But in losing all she deserves no more compassion than the fraudulent gambler who beggars himself in the attempt to fleece his pigeon."

Lesley shook his head. It was incredible—not that Olga should have concealed her crime, but that she could have simulated such constant and undeviating love and

devotion as that which had glorified his wedded life. The Right Hon. was too astute to push a theory beyond the limits of acceptance.

"Granting," he pursued, "that you have engendered a responsive feeling of affection in this woman's heart since your wedding—I refuse to admit the possibility of her entertaining any true sentiment of love for you at that time she was deliberately plotting with her grandfather to make you her dupe—granting that she has now some decent and respectable feeling for you, the necessity of divorce is not lessened, but, on the contrary, increased. After this revelation you have no intention, I presume, of presenting this woman, in honest society, as your wife?"

"No," said Lesley; "that is impossible."

"You must withdraw from society and live beyond its pale—a Pariah. You can never decently attempt to mix among old friends or form the acquaintance of new ones while that woman can claim you as her husband. You will be as completely ostracized as if you yourself were criminal. That fate is the best I could hope for; but I fear a worse. I fear that little by little compassion for your wife; generous recognition of some good qualities which she possibly may possess, and the blunting effect of time and association will dull your finer sense of honor, and lead you, at some distant date, to condone your wife's offence and bear exile for her sake. Exile for her and you, too, must become unendurable, and one day you will seek to recover your place in respectable society. Your wife will be openly slighted, you will hear whispers behind your back, and you will have to take a place amongst white-washed bankrupts and persons of doubtful character. And this is why I say that divorce is more imperatively necessary if your wife claims some consideration from you than if she claimed none at all."

The protest on Lesley's lips was silenced by the consciousness that in his heart he was already finding excuses for Olga.

"Another argument for divorce has to be considered, Lesley," the Right Hon. continued, following up his advantage. "In this woman and in her father you see the effect of heredity. Think what your shame must be to find that your sons and daughters have in their blood this taint of dishonesty."

Again Lesley started under this new shock.

"We *must* separate," he said.

"Mere separation is not sufficient. If your wife is careless she will disgrace your name, being still your wife; if she is careful she will, in time, dupe you again."

"No, no—that is not possible," said Lesley, wildly.

"It is more than possible—it is probable. I know your tender nature, Lesley, better than you know it yourself. You must obtain a divorce, or what is to become of you!"

"And if I obtain a divorce," cried Lesley, starting up; "what is to become of her?"

The Right Hon. shrugged his shoulders in silence and leant back in his chair with a sigh—discouraged by the difficulty of guiding one so limp and helpless rather than by that of answering his son's question.

"I cannot abandon her like a faithless mistress," said Lesley; "without a home or a friend, what could she do?"

"With a certain provision which I might be disposed to make, her condition would not be quite so deplorable as your imagination conceives. She is fond of applause, movement, excitement——"

"And where would the love of excitement lead her in that abandonment?"

Waiving the question with another shrug, the Right Hon. said—

"In any case, her position could not be worse than it was before you married her."

"I must think before I decide to take such a course as you propose."

"Do, by all means. Come and see me again—tomorrow, say. I shall be here at lunch-time. In the afternoon we could go to Lincoln's Inn and talk it over with the lawyer."

He rose as he spoke as a hint that the interview should terminate here, but Lesley sat plunged in sombre meditation, looking at the pattern in the tablecloth, his chin sunk in his breast.

"With regard to the payment of that bond," said the Right Hon.—"a matter which had almost escaped my memory in this much more serious discussion—you must expect no help from me until you have agreed to a divorce. My determination is fixed upon that point. Your own

weakness, evident in the regrettable attitude you have taken, removes any doubt I might have entertained on the subject. This woman must be got rid of; she shall not ruin your life and my happiness at the same time. If you will not divorce her, she must be made to leave you. I have no doubt you will meet your bond. To do that you must raise money. That will entail poverty and hardships which, with forced retirement from society, will become unendurable to your wife. Within a few months—I might almost prognosticate a few weeks—she will abandon you if I know anything of the nature of such women. It would be better for her and for you also to obtain a divorce. Now, go and weigh well what I have said to you."

Lesley was scarcely conscious of what his father said—the word "Divorce" was repeating itself in his mind and he could hear nothing else. But instinctively he rose, took up his hat, and left the house.

The word kept ringing in his ears as he wandered through the streets—"Divorce! Divorce! Divorce!"—like a warning sound of approaching doom.

In Piccadilly Circus he felt a hand laid on his arm, and stopped aghast, finding a young woman by his side in a sealskin mantle. For the moment he thought it was Olga. Then as he saw the hard, abandoned, loveless look in that painted face he broke away, answering, fiercely, "Never!" to the echoing word "Divorce!"

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

UNFORGIVEN.

WITH a vague, fearful apprehension of a crowning calamity in his mind, Lesley entered his rooms to find a bright fire burning, a neatly swept hearth, and the table laid for dinner. A black fireplace, a room in disorder, and neglect would have been in harmony with his ideas. The anti-climax was complete when, halting irresolute on the threshold of his wife's room, he heard the door opposite open and saw Olga enter with a covered dish for his supper.

For some time after his departure Olga had sat stunned by the blow that had fallen upon her ; then conscious that the only issue from her difficulties was in action, she roused herself.

"I have done a great wrong," she said to herself. "Now, what reparation can I make?" The answer to that question was not clear ; but it was evident to her womanly intelligence that this was no time to rest supine and silent like a sulking child waiting for forgiveness. She was the offender, and it was for her to take the initiative, and make the first advance towards a reconciliation—if reconciliation were possible. What could she do in his absence? Feminine intuition served her where reasoning might have failed to supply a suggestion. She bethought her of Lesley's physical wants and personal comforts. In a little while he would return : it would only add to his misery to find the place cheerless and dull. She turned out the gas and lit the wax candles, a light which Lesley preferred, built up the fire, and set the room in order. After that she spent half an hour over her toilette. That done, she put a clean cloth on the dining table, and laid the service. The rest of the time she spent chiefly in the kitchen, listening for his footstep in the corridor, and superintending the preparation of his favorite dish.

"I have dined, Lesley," she said, as she put the cover on the table before his chair. "I did not know what time you would return."

"It is better so," he replied, seating himself. "We cannot pretend to live as if nothing had occurred to estrange us."

She accepted the rebuke without a word of remonstrance, and taking a book, seated herself by the fireside.

His meaning was not to be misunderstood. Though she was permitted to stay under the same roof with him, they were to live apart. It was right : she could not expect to be forgiven at once ; she hardly wished it, feeling that her fault could only be expiated by suffering. She would take the punishment she deserved—more than she deserved, if that might be, and still bless the hand that inflicted it. She would wait with patient hope for the day to come when her husband's heart should again respond to her love. Meanwhile she would let no false pride or strained sentiment impede her natural impulses, even if they brought her nothing but rebuke from Lesley.

She observed, with secret satisfaction, that he ate the food she had prepared for him. He would not do that if he loathed her now with the loathing she had read in his face when he turned his eyes from her father to her. That was something gained.

With these thoughts revolving in her mind, she sat silent and still until Lesley had finished his meal; then she rose, and coming to the table, spoke to him with calm earnestness in her face and voice.

"I understood what you said to me just now, Lesley, but there are other things which I must ask you to make clear to me. Is the world to know that we are estranged?"

"That must be known. Heavens! would you still carry on the deception?"

"Not for my own sake, for I have nothing now to lose by discovery; but for your sake I would still make the world believe your wife spotless."

"It's scarcely worth the trouble," he answered, bitterly.

"In a little while the world will cease to think of me at all."

"What do you mean by that?" Olga asked in alarm.

"No more than one with your power of calculation might expect—I shall withdraw from society. You also will cease to visit my friends. That is understood?"

She bowed assent; then turning to the unanswered correspondence on her table, said—

"There are letters of invitation here which should be answered."

"I will answer them. Leave them there. Have you anything else to ask?"

"Do you wish me to break my engagement at the Albert Hall?"

"No; you are free to occupy your time as you please, so long as you do not bring discredit on my name. You will need pleasure of some form that is harmless."

"It was not for pleasure—excitement—applause, that I sang, Lesley, but for money."

"You will need that too. I shall have none. My father refuses to help me. If your grandfather keeps his word, I shall keep mine. Everything I possess shall be sold up. When the term of these chambers is up I will find cheaper lodgings. I will not rest till that debt of dishonor is cleared off."

"Nor I," said Olga with impressive earnestness. "Oh,

you shall not bear this burden long, Lesley. See how much I have earned in the past few months; it is a trifle compared with what I will win in the future. I am free to work now. I was hampered and shackled then. I will teach, I will get new engagements. I will write, and the debt, great as it is, will grow small and cease to be." It seemed to her, in that hopeful moment, that to wipe off the debt was to obliterate her shame, and she continued, with heightened enthusiasm: "It is not as if we were two helpless creatures with no resource—as when we faced poverty at Pangbourne—we have something to begin with."

"Something to begin with—what?"

"Our book. That is to be published in a few months."

"I had forgotten that," said Lesley in a tone that chilled Olga's newborn hope.

He went in silence to his desk, and brought back the part he had written.

"This is all false," he said, glancing at the pages that brought back vividly to his memory the happy, careless days at Pangbourne.

"It is imaginary," Olga stammered.

"From beginning to end."

"Yes."

"'Lies told to a trusting husband,' would be a good sub-title."

"What are you doing?" she asked in terror as he tore the MS. in half.

"I am going to burn it." He tore the paper again, setting his teeth and bending his brows in anger.

"No, no, Lesley! Think; those pages are worth hundreds of pounds!" she cried.

"If they were worth thousands they would burn as well. Do you think I will be party to your fraud and father this impudent lie?" He flung the torn folios on the fire and himself in a chair, with his back turned upon Olga. The book she had been reading lay beside him; he took it up and made a desperate endeavor to read.

Overwhelmed with humiliation and shame, Olga stood silently watching the flames as they curled over the matted MS. To her also those papers were a memento of happiness. She knew every line by heart. The flame, licking a line crossed out, recalled the morning when Lesley, catching sight of a rift in the clouds, threw down

his pen and would have her go with him for a walk. They took the dogs, she remembered. Her joy was scarcely less wild than theirs. She held Rags back to see how quickly he could overtake his master, and afterwards she herself had flown over the ground to regain him and press his dear arm to her side. That was the morning when he told her that love was the only real happiness in the world; the one thing to live for and die for; that all other pleasures were but a means of killing time and making us forget our real existence.

The page was black now and it burst into flame, it died and crumbled away, and with it even the memory of happiness died also, and nothing was left her but desolation and despair.

She wept for the first time that day, standing there behind her husband's chair within touch of the man she loved, whose love now was gone forever. She was so still and silent that Lesley concluded she had gone to her room. He thought her hardened and unfeeling—dull alike to shame and remorse. He never knew what agony wrung her heart as she choked down the rising sob—never knew of the streaming tears that sprang from the exhaustless misery of her soul.

All was silent. The embers of the burnt paper ceased to rustle and crackle. He turned over the pages of his book mechanically, without comprehending the sense of the lines his eyes had followed. He started with surprise when Olga, having stanchd her tears and brought her faculties under control, said, in a husky voice, "Good-night."

Had she been waiting, then, all this time for him to turn and find her? Had she come from her room, calculating that he had been given time enough to overcome his anger? What rule of conduct could be applied to the grandchild of such a heartless, cunning hypocrite as Ivan Isaakoff?

"Good-night, Lesley," Olga said again, more clearly, but with an uncontrollable tremor in her voice, and as she spoke she stretched out her yearning hand and laid it on his arm.

"Good-night," he responded, coldly, putting her hand away from his arm, not rudely, but firmly.

He waited, expecting her to speak again, but there was not a sound. Her voice still echoed in his ear, and its

pathetic tremor touched some divine chord of mercy or love in his heart.

"What if her heart aches like mine," he thought—"if she is still the Olga I have loved and not the woman I have come to hate!"

He turned; she was no longer behind him. The door was closing. He rose impulsively and strode forward; then at the very threshold he checked himself, and suffered the door to close, as his father's prophetic warning returned to his mind:

"I fear that little by little compassion for your wife, recognition or some good qualities which she may possess, and the blunting effect of time and association will dull your finer sense of honor, and lead you to condone your wife's offence. One day you will seek to resume a place in respectable society. Your wife will be openly slighted; you will hear whispers behind your back; and you will have to resign yourself to a place amongst whitewashed bankrupts and persons of doubtful character. In this woman and her father you see the effects of heredity. Think what your shame must be to find your sons and daughters with this taint of dishonesty in their blood."

CHAPTER XXXIX.

THE FRIEND IN NEED.

MR. DAVID McALLISTER was seated in the editorial office of the *Financial Guide*, making up his paper; half a dozen proofs on the table before him; the printer's foreman at his elbow with a handful of slips, when a clerk from the outer office brought in a card and presented it. He glanced at the card, reflected a couple of moments, tapping his white teeth with his pencil, and half closing his eyes; then he nodded, telling the clerk to show the gentleman in at once, and dismissed the foreman with a few decisive instructions. The printer left the office as the clerk ushered in the visitor, Mr. Lesley Dunbar.

McAllister rose and gave his hand as the door closed.

"Delighted to see you again, Mr. Dunbar," he said;

"quite an age since we met. Take a chair. Mrs. Dunbar quite well, I hope."

He observed, as Lesley removed his hat and seated himself that he was hollow-eyed, haggard, sallow, and looked twenty years older, and also that he answered the oft inquiry respecting his wife evasively and with constraint.

"You're not looking well—troubled and worried," McAllister proceeded in a tone of explanation. "I thought that possibly Mrs. Dunbar might be suffering from the annoyance of this scandalous affair at the Universe. The masked lady, you know—you've seen the papers?"

"Oh, that!" exclaimed Lesley, cavalierly, after a moment's perplexity as the affair of the music hall returned to his recollection. "If it were only that!" he said to himself with a look of abstraction in his face.

McAllister, observing him closely, said to himself, "He has found out all about her, or I'm a Dutchman."

"I am troubled, McAllister, more than I can tell you," Lesley added.

"Very sorry to hear it—very sorry indeed. Can I be of any service to you."

"I came to you with that hope. I am in difficulty. I have incurred a debt which I may have to meet before the end of the week. My father declines to help me."

McAllister made a running commentary.

"It isn't play, nor horses," he said to himself. "Never committed a big excess in his life; what is it?"

"The only solicitor I know is my father's," continued Lesley. "And he, of course, could not act for me. My father would decline to give any security to a professional money-lender——"

"For Heaven's sake, Mr. Dunbar, have nothing to do with men of that kind," said McAllister earnestly.

"I know that is a desperate course; but my case is desperate. I might call upon a dozen solicitors without finding one who could negotiate a loan for me; but it struck me that you, having so much to do with financial matters, could put me in communication with one who made affairs of this sort his business."

McAllister nodded gravely, and asked what amount Lesley wished to raise.

"Fifteen thousand pounds," said Lesley.

"A good round sum," observed McAllister, raising his

eyebrows with the reflection that this was about the market value of Major Caldecott's lost diamond. "A good round sum."

"My income amounts to five hundred a year; the rest of my assets may be worth two hundred. Unless my father's displeasure causes him to revoke his late intentions, I shall inherit his fortune."

"Of course I never do anything in this way myself," said McAllister. "I mean as a matter of business. But if my means allowed me I should not hesitate as a friend to let you have this sum on the security of your expectations. What do you think of getting a wealthier friend to back your bill? Now"—he paused, with his head on one side, half closing his eyes—"there's your old friend, Major Caldecott." Lesley stopped him at once with a gesture of alarm.

"Let me say at once that I do not wish Major Caldecott to know one word with regard to this negotiation."

"I understand," said McAllister, comprehending more than Lesley suspected. "I will not breathe a word of the matter to any one, if that is your wish."

"On the contrary, I wish every one to know that I am in pecuniary difficulties. It will account for our necessary withdrawal from society, and obviate painful explanations. I had that in my mind when I thought of asking you for advice and help. But I do not wish it known that I am raising this sum of money."

Again McAllister understood. It was natural, he said, that Lesley should wish to conceal his father's displeasure.

"As for the loan," he continued, "I don't apprehend any great difficulty in raising that. I can lay my hand on three or four honest and trustworthy men who will advance the money on fair terms. Of course your father or his solicitor must be approached. You do not object to that?"

"No."

"Then, if you leave the matter in my hands, I will do my best. I think I may promise, Mr. Dunbar, to have the money ready for you by Friday. I will myself undertake the responsibility of giving you a check upon your note of hand if other means fail."

There was a pause, a recapitulation of particulars, and then McAllister, after a brief attempt to open another sub-

ject, rose and gave his hand again to Lesley and led him to the door, begging him to give his regards to Mrs. Dunbar.

When Lesley was gone, McAllister took a telegram form and wrote out the following message to his correspondent, Zimmerman, at Hamburg:—

“Demand for large black crystal. What price? Wire reply immediately.

“DAVID.”

This telegram he himself took to the post-office and despatched. Then he took a hansom and hunted up the Right Hon.

“I shall not apologize for taking up your valuable time,” he began, when they were walking slowly along Palace Yard, “for I feel that I am doing the right thing, not only by your son, but by you, sir. I have just left Mr. Lesley. He is in great distress—”

The Right Hon. interrupted him with an apologetic gesture.

“Did I understand the messenger rightly—that you wished to see me on an important matter of business?”

“You did, sir. Business, and nothing but business. I come to the point at once. Your son wants £15,000 by the end of the week, and came to me to know how he was to raise it. If it had been an ordinary applicant, I should have given him the names of half a dozen solicitors and sent him to try them. As he is not an ordinary applicant, but one whose father I have the honor to consider as a friend, I thought it better to come here myself and *try you*.”

“I have told my son that he has nothing to expect from me,” responded the Right Hon, sternly, disregarding McAllister’s pleasantry.

“He said he had displeased you. Fathers usually are displeased when their sons incur debts which they foresee must sooner or later be paid out of their own pockets. But that is no reason why you should render yourself liable to still further displeasure. Now, sir, suppose you let Mr. Lesley have his own way, and that way is the best I can recommend, he may have to lay his case before half a dozen financial negotiators. They institute inquiries and set all the clappers in society going. Your son has not told me the nature of his debt, but it is pretty safe to conclude that it is a debt of honor. Well, if a man

loses at play to a blackleg and gives his bond he must meet it or be cashiered. You cannot afford to run that risk; the punishment of his folly would fall, not upon him, but on you. People always sympathize with a young man who gets into debt. It would be known that he had done his utmost to meet his responsibilities. It might even be said that he had allowed his wife to play the heroic part of singing in disguise at a music hall to save his honor."

The Right Hon. held his breath.

"They would not inquire," McAllister continued, "whether you were justified in refusing to help your son; they would simply regard the rupture as an expedient on your part to avoid paying £15,000 to a blackleg; and they would say that you sacrificed your son's reputation from parsimonious motives."

The Right Hon. winced—conscious that carefulness in pecuniary affairs was his weakness.

"Now observe, sir," pursued McAllister, "what a handle you offer your political adversaries to work on: what capital the *Interviewer* and rags of that kind could make out of it."

"And what, Mr. McAllister," said the Right Hon., in his stiffest manner—"what alternative are you good enough to suggest?"

"Hush it up, sir—hush it up. No one knows of this affair yet except myself; and I promise you it shall go no further, so far as I am concerned. Pay the money and hush it up."

The Right Hon. shook his head.

"My son must be made to suffer," he said.

"As a corrective—certainly. Save him, save yourself, and lose nothing; that can easily be managed."

The Right Hon. inclined his ear.

"Mr. Lesley tells me his income is five hundred a year. It comes from you, I suppose."

The Right Hon. assented.

"Five hundred a year represents roughly a capital of ten thousand pounds. Let him draw that out in a lump if he chooses; understanding, of course, that he stops the source of his income. The remaining five thousand I will let him now have at the market rate on his note of hand, backed by you. To pay interest on the five thousand, and his domestic expenses as well, his brow will

have to sweat. And if this responsibility does not punish him for past follies and keep him straight in the future, I am vastly mistaken."

The Right Hon. assented again by an inclination of his head, and after walking a few steps further in silence, he stopped and gave his hand to McAllister.

"I am greatly obliged to you for your practical and friendly advice, McAllister. This afternoon I will see my solicitor, and if he raises no objection to this course I shall be pleased to accept it. May I find you in Fleet Street to-morrow morning?"

"Any time between eleven and two."

"I will call upon you, and if it is convenient, we will then conclude this business, one way or the other."

They parted with mutual good will.

"That stops inquiry," said McAllister to himself.

He drove to his office in Sandy's Row, and there found an answer to the telegram sent to Zimmerman, which confirmed his conclusions.

Zimmerman said :—

"Sold out this morning. Purchaser taking it to England : journey, *viâ* Flushing and Queenborough."

McAllister, prepared for this reply, had already matured his plan of further operation. He wrote out another telegram, addressed this time to James Parker,—Terrace, Whitechapel Road. It puzzled the young woman at the telegraph office in Cornhill when she read it :—

"Our kind friend with the jack pistol is on his way to tell the blunder to Dunbar, who shows all of a row to Queenborough at once and be steady to relieve the old chief. Your last prance don't kiss it this time. Catch a hare alive thou for the pistol if delivered all round in Heaven's praise."

"X. Y. Z."

Translated from the thieves's rhyming slang, in which it was written, the telegram read thus :—

"Our blind friend with the black crystal is on his way to sell the plunder to Dunbar, who knows all. Go to Queenborough at once, and be ready to relieve the old thief. Your last chance. Don't miss it this time. Five thou (thousand) for the crystal if delivered all sound in seven days."

He endorsed the back of the telegram—"James Harris, 43, Minories."

CHAPTER XL.

A DIFFICULT UNDERTAKING.

THE Flushing boat came alongside the wharf at Queenborough. On the quay above, Mr. and Mrs. Parker were standing, at some distance apart, amongst the customary crowd of officials, porters, and loafers. A keen east wind was blowing; the collar of Parker's inverness was turned up to his ears; his wife wore a huge woollen wrap and a veil, which she had turned up, leaving just the violet tip of her long thin nose and her ferret eyes visible. The custom house officers trooped on board to examine the small luggage, and the passengers who had delayed leaving the cabin began to appear on deck. Almost the last to come out was Zassoulitch and his attendant. The old man, in his superb furs, was unmistakable. One hand rested lightly on the arm of his attendant; the other was thrust in his breast. The Parkers knew what he had got there, and they stretched their necks with a hungry look in their faces, like dogs at the smell of flesh.

But it was the attendant who occupied their serious attention. He must be "got at," or got out of the way, before Zassoulitch could be approached. Was he an easy subject to manage? That was the question in their minds. Parker observed that he was well built and young; not easy to get out of the way if it came to a trial of physical strength. Mrs. Parker noted that he wore well-fitting gloves and a fashionable over-coat, and concluded he might be a gentleman-secretary, and consequently difficult to be "got at." He carried a dressing-case in his right hand as he walked on the left of Zassoulitch. She watched him until he had opened the dressing-case and a portman-teau brought by the steward for inspection, and then worked her way round by the back of the gang of porters to her husband. He, seeing her, fell back, and they exchanged a few rapid observations.

"There's no chucking him out of the carriage if they go on," said Parker.

"If they stay at the hotel for a week, I don't believe we shall get him in a line."

"The old man's got it in his breast pocket," he muttered.

"We must get it out, then. It's our last chance," she responded.

"If they go to the hotel we shall have a bit of time to settle what's best."

"I don't believe the old man 'll do that. He looks as strong as you; don't walk as if he'd been bad. And if he ain't queer, it's not likely he'll waste time here."

"Well, mind what I told you. As much depends on you as me. I'll stick to the old man; you work the other. You must keep him here if there's half a chance, and I'll go on with the old 'un. If they ain't to be separated, we both go on together with 'em and get up a row in the train or at Victoria."

"Look out, Jim; they're coming off the boat, seemingly."

They separated again, taking opposite sides of the gangway by which the passengers were coming up. Presently Zassoulitch came in sight—his right hand still thrust in his breast; his left holding his attendant's arm. A perfectly open face, a well-developed chest, confirmed the fears of Mr. and Mrs. Parker with regard to this young man's character.

"Hotel, sir, hotel?" asked one of the hotel porters, touching his hat to the attendant.

"No; train," responded the hand who followed Zassoulitch with his portmanteau; "which end, Victoria?"

Parker stepped out of the crowd, and hastening into the booking-office took a first-class single to Victoria. Running down the platform he passed the attendant, who had a couple of letters in his hand; Mrs. Parker followed half a dozen yards behind. With a little backward jerk of the head she indicated as they passed where her husband would find Zassoulitch. The hand who had brought up the portmanteau was coming out of a compartment. Parker looked in and saw Zassoulitch seated in a corner lighting a cigarette—the sole occupant. As he stepped in Zassoulitch said—

"You have been very quick."

"I beg your pardon," said Parker, disguising his voice as well as he could.

"I beg *your* pardon, sir," Zassoulitch returned with a bow of apology. "I thought you were the gentleman who kindly undertook to post two letters for me. This is a smoking carriage, I believe?"

"Yes, sir."

Zassoulitch threw away his vesta and put his hand back in his breast, asking himself who it was that invariably pronounced those two words in that way, as if they were written "Yussir."

"Oh, if Jinny only tackles that fellow to rights!" said Parker to himself as he softly closed the door and turned the handle.

Jinny was doing her best.

After the attendant had dropped the letters in the box, he turned into the refreshment room. Mrs. Parker followed him in half a minute later, and caught sight of him trying to find a place at the crowded bar. She wedged herself in beside him and clamored for tea. The young man having made his demand for "Irish" cold, drew out a purse from his pocket, opened it, turned over the contents, picked out a sovereign, and pocketed the purse. Mrs. Parker, all the time she screamed for tea, kept one penetrating eye on him and noted all she saw.

The young man got his whisky and Mrs. Parker her cup of scalding tea. The bar-maid took the sovereign, gave change, and then addressing Mrs. Parker demanded sixpence for the tea.

"Victoria train going on. Take your seats, please," called the guard at the door.

The young man pocketed his change; Mrs. Parker fumbled in her purse.

"Now, then, gentleman, train going on," called the guard again.

The young man gulped down his dram and joined the throng pushing out to the platform.

"Here, I've had my pocket picked!" Mrs. Parker cried out; and bolting after the young man she laid hands on him, adding, "Young man, you've got my purse."

The guard slipped out and called the station police sergeant. He stepped in sharply and found Mrs. Parker clutching the young man and screaming accusations at him.

"He's picked my pocket, policeman," she cried. "I,

suspected him the moment he came pushing up against me at the counter. He's got my purse : it's a red leather purse."

"This is the only purse I have," said the young man, producing his purse.

"That's it," cried Mrs. Parker.

"She said it was red leather," said the sergeant, with a suspicious look at the young man.

"Yes, and I can tell you what's inside it, sir," pursued Mrs. Parker. "There's three gold pieces and five silver, one large, all foreign money."

The sergeant opened the purse, glanced inside, and then said—

"You'll have to come to the station with me, young man."

"As you please. But I've left my dressing-case in the train."

"Which part?" asked the guard, quickly.

"Victoria. First-class compartment. I left it on the seat opposite a blind gentleman."

The guard ran down the platform, and seeing Zassoulitch opened the door of his compartment.

"Does this dressing-case belong to you, sir?" he asked, laying his hand on it.

"I am blind," said Zassoulitch. "Let me feel it."

The guard put it in his hands, and while he was feeling it, said—

"A gentleman's charged with picking a lady's pocket ; says he left his dressing-case on the seat opposite a blind gentleman. He's going to the station to be charged, and if that belongs to him——"

"It does not belong to me," said Zassoulitch. "I have only a portmanteau. The porter put it over my head."

"There it is, sir. Nothing else, sir? Not lost anything?"

Zassoulitch put his hand in his breast and answered that he had lost nothing.

"Nor you either, sir?" asked the guard, addressing Parker.

Parker shook his head.

The guard withdrew, taking the case, and closed the door.

"Surely there is a mistake," said Zassoulitch. "I cannot

believe that the gentleman who gave me his assistance in leaving the boat was an ordinary pickpocket. You observed him, sir, perhaps."

"I cannot say that I did," answered Parker, again attempting to disguise his voice.

"A most unobtrusive, pleasant-speaking gentleman. Can you see him from the window?"

Parker craned out in feverish fear that some loitering passenger might run up at the last moment and enter the compartment. The guard blew a whistle, the train moved, and Parker, sitting down, looked across at Zassoulitch giddy with exultation. Now he had the old man to himself—here, within arms' reach: now the moment was at hand to pay off old scores and execute summary justice on the old rascal.

"What do you make of it, sir?" asked Zassoulitch.

"I can't see him, so I suppose he is taken into custody. We're off now." He spoke in a less guarded tone, for his mind was chiefly occupied with the problem of overpowering the old man and getting the diamond out of his breast; and his eye was on the alarm signal.

"Strange," said Zassoulitch, leaning back in his corner and crossing his legs, after lending an attentive ear to Parker. "Very strange. The lady would scarcely have charged him with picking her pocket unless she was tolerably sure; the consequences of making a false charge would involve her in such unpleasant consequences. On the other hand, it seems incredible that a person who can afford to travel first-class on a journey of this length should risk so much for a purse which, after all, may contain but a few shillings."

"Yes, it does," answered Parker, thinking that it would be well to defer the attack until the old man was a little less wide awake.

"Have you ever remarked, sir, how particularly thick-headed and clumsy thieves—especially English thieves—are?" said Zassoulitch, obviously bent on drawing out his fellow passenger.

"No, I haven't."

"If you take the trouble to examine the subject, you will find that they are. Now, take the present case for an example. Presuming that he actually has picked the lady's pocket, it is highly probable that his original intention was to rob me. Possibly he imagined by my

travelling first-class, and wearing a decent coat, that I had something upon me worth taking, and also by my being blind, advanced in years, and alone, that he would have very little difficulty in taking it. What folly! I ask you, sir, as a practical Englishman, would any one but a dense and thick-headed dolt be led away by such false conclusions?"

Parker was too ill at ease to reply, and the old man continued.

"In the first place, if I had anything of great value about me, I should not be so idiotic as to let myself be shut up for two or three hours in a carriage with a person I knew nothing about. That's evident, isn't it?"

Parker muttered a few inarticulate words, and then his jaw fell.

"In the second place," pursued Zassoulitch, airily, "it is equally absurd to think that a man is unable to protect himself because he is old and blind. A man of ordinary sense would have perceived that those infirmities would lead me to provide myself with all necessary safeguards. Now here in my pocket"—he stirred the hand in his pocket—"I habitually carry a small sixchamber revolver. A child might use it. I hold it in such a position that I could discharge it without taking my hand from my breast. In the event of a personal encounter, it would be odd if one of those six balls did not hit my adversary somewhere. In any case it would alarm the passengers in the adjoining compartment. They would communicate with the guard; the train would be stopped, and my poor, misguided, muddle-headed foe would assuredly be caught—getting nothing for all his pains but a possible bullet in some part of his anatomy, and a probable term of ten or fifteen years penal servitude. There's a certain romance about roguery which would lead one to take some interest in rogues if they only had a little more intelligence; don't you think so, sir?"

"I haven't any opinion either one way or the other," Parker replied, moodily.

"Pardon me, sir—I see that subject is distasteful to you. Perhaps you have been robbed."

"No."

"Ah! I congratulate you; for certainly the self-respect of a person who has suffered himself to be victimied by a thief must be even lower than that of the thief who has

to admit that he has not cleverness enough for his business."

Parker ground his teeth in impotent rage. Here was the opportunity provided for him, and he dared not take advantage of it. The old man's cunning revived again that sentiment of uncanny awe he had felt at Pangbourne. His perception seemed to be more than human: it confounded and baffled Parker. He did not know what to believe or what to disbelieve. Had the old man *not* got the diamond? Had he got the revolver? These were questions which Parker had not the courage or foolhardiness to put to practical test. He could only sit and glare at the old man as he calmly smoked out his cigarette with a look of supreme satisfaction on his face.

Still hope was not quite dead in James Parker's breast, and it revived considerably towards the end of the journey.

"We seem to be slackening speed," said Zassoulitch, breaking the long silence. "Are we nearing Victoria?"

"We are running into the station now. May I get a cab for you?"

"If it is not troubling you too much."

It would have troubled Parker much more had he declined. He was on the platform before the train had stopped; he had signalled a four-wheel cab on the rank opposite, and was back at the carriage door before the porter could seize the old man's portmanteau. He steered him through the pushing throng, bundled him into the cab with his port manteau, and shut the door before Zassoulitch could say a word.

"Where shall I tell the cabman to take you, sir?" he asked, thrusting his head in at the window.

"The Prince's Hotel, Adelphi. I thank you very much for your services and your agreeable companionship."

"Don't mention it," replied Parker, gleefully. "Good-evening."

Then he called out the address, but in such a manner that the driver could not catch it.

"Where did you say I was to go?" he asked, as Parker softly and nimbly mounted and took the seat beside him on the box.

"Beatrice Terrace, Whitechapel Road. Drive like fury!" replied Parker, in a low tone.

CHAPTER XLI.

THE RESTORATION.

"Yes, that's it," said the young man accused with stealing Mrs. Parker's purse, as the guard brought in the dressing-case. He examined it to see that the lock had not been opened, and then continued: "I was more anxious about this than the charge of pocket picking. There's no need to go to the police station; I'll show that the purse is mine in a couple of minutes. I don't want to lose the train. Now, then, policeman, the woman has told you that there are gold and silver coins in the purse. Let her tell you what pieces they are; if she can't, I will. If that doesn't settle the question, let her tell you what is in the middle division closed with a clasp. Quick! If I lose that train it will be your fault."

The sergeant, thus urged, opened the purse briskly.

"Now, then, missis," said he, "you hear what the gentleman says. What's these coins in here?"

The train was still standing at the platform; an answer would betray her and lose all. She avoided it by a happy expedient. Tottering to a seat, she sank down, apparently overcome by excitement, and faintly gasped for a glass of water.

"Lost!" muttered the young man, as he saw the train slowly sweeping past the window.

"Saved!" said Mrs. Parker to herself, blinking at the train over the water brought to her by a sympathetic porter. Then, recovering a little, she shook her head dismally at the sergeant, and said—

"Now I come to look at the purse, Mr. Policeman, I'm afraid I've made a mistake. Mine had round corners, but I'll take oath it had three sovereigns, two half crowns, and some shillings in it."

"Well, these ain't half crowns, nor shillings, nor sovereigns neither—all German money," said the sergeant.

"The only English money left is in notes, in the clasped division," said the young man.

"There were no notes in mine," said Mrs. Parker, meekly, "and I apologize most humbly to you, sir, for the mistake I made."

The young man took back his purse without reply, and going to the counter, ordered another whisky.

The station master, who had been a silent observer of the explanation, came to his side and said in a low voice—

"That woman has been hanging about here since yesterday morning. It looks like a plant, though I don't see how she was to profit by it."

"I've lost my train—that's all," replied the other, with a careless shrug of his shoulders. "If I hadn't got back this case, it might have been serious, for I was engaged expressly to come over here and deliver it. I had left it in the carriage, you know."

"Hardly safe, if the article was of such importance, was it?"

"Oh, I left it in charge of the gentleman who employed me."

"Then it wouldn't have mattered much if it had gone on."

"Yes, it would. The gentleman is blind. I don't know where he lives in London; and I should have had to go back to Hamburg and tell the firm who recommended me as a careful commissioner that I had not carried out the instructions I was paid to execute. And the funny thing is, I was warned by my employer that possibly we might be separated by accident, in which case I was to go on to my destination with this. So, you see, I should have got into a mess if the thing had gone on. When's the next train out?"

"Ten past four. You've got an hour and a quarter to wait."

He went on by the 4.10, and Mrs. Parker also. She tried to keep him in sight, but at Victoria he jumped into a hansom, and she did not even catch the direction he gave to the driver.

She too went to the expense of a hansom, the sooner to end her intolerable anxiety respecting the fate of Zasloulitch and her husband. Had he strangled the old man in the train and got off safely with the diamond?

Parker himself opened the door when she rang the bell of their modestly respectable little house in *Beatrice Terrace*.

"Well, have you got it?" she asked.

He held up his finger warningly.

"He's in the back parlor."

"Who?"

"The old man."

"The diamond?" she demanded in a whisper as she entered the narrow passage and shut the door.

"He's got it on him. I believe he's the devil himself."

"That's what you were always saying. Devil or not, we'll get it from him now."

"Be careful; I think he's got a pistol. He never takes his hand out of his coat."

"That's the diamond. I'm not afraid of a blind man. Come on."

She spoke with an air of courage and resolution; nevertheless, her voice did not rise above a whisper. She opened the door cautiously and entered with stealth. Already she felt that grim dread of sounds which stills a murderer's steps when his victim is dead.

Zassoulitch, still wearing his fur coat, sat in an easy chair before the small fire. He turned his head as the door opened, and said amiably—

"That must be Mrs. Parker. No one could ring a bell like that except Mrs. Parker. Why did you stay to whisper in the passage? No need of ceremony in your own house. I know it is your house: the narrow passage, the slippery cloth that covers this chair, a smell of lately cooked herrings, and that bell, all reflect your tastes so truly. Parker would bring me here. I told him I wished to go to our old hotel in the Adelphi; but he made the driver bring me through Whitechapel with its peculiar sounds and the refreshing smell of slaughter houses and naphtha lamps. It's so like him to put himself out of the way on my account—so like you both"—there was a little dash of acerbity in his tone here—"so very much like both of you to do stupid things when you wish to be clever. You did not get into any trouble with the gentleman who helped me leave the boat. I feel sure you didn't, or you would not be here. He had business to attend to, and so he let you go your way, and he went his—with that little square dressing-case."

Parker and his wife glanced at each other—the former with ghastly fear in his face.

"I was greatly interested in that young man," pursued

Zassoulitch, after a pause ; "and I couldn't help thinking a good deal about him in the train as we came up, Parker and I. I knew he would clear himself of the charge you so thoughtlessly brought against him ; but still, I feared he might get into trouble again when he reached London. I said to myself, 'Now, when I arrive at Victoria, shall I engage a railway porter to get me a hansom, or shall I ask Parker to fetch me a cab ? If I take a hansom, there'll be no room for Parker, and he will be left behind. Left behind, Parker will naturally wait for the next train to come in from Queenborough. My young friend with the dressing-case will arrive by that train ; so will Mrs. Parker. Then Parker may make the same mistake that you made, my dear soul, only he will try to get the dressing-case instead of the purse ; and I don't know how that will end.' So then I decided I would not have a hansom, but let Parker take me just wherever he pleased. Well, it has pleased him to bring me here, and pay the cabman ; and now, my unfortunate friends, the best thing you can do, in my opinion, is to fetch another cab and let me go where I please."

Mrs. Parker could stand this no longer. Starting forward like a fury, and only restrained from springing upon the old man by Parker, who was the greater coward, she cried, shaking her outstretched hands at him—

"You don't get away from us, you—old thief, till we know what's in that pocket !"

"Old thief is not an agreeable form of expression, my poor soul ; but I make every allowance for your infirmity of temper, and the state of exasperation produced by the failure of expensive experiments. I have told Parker what I carry in my pocket—there it is." He produced a small revolver. "If Parker would like to see for himself what else I have in my pockets he is quite at liberty to examine them. Don't be afraid, Parker. I shall be very careful with the revolver. Whitechapel has such a bad name that it would be extremely unpleasant to be concerned even in a case of accidental death. To quite gratify your curiosity I will take my coat off—if it will not shock Mrs. Parker."

The young man with the dressing-case arrived at Pangbourne a little after ten o'clock that night. Hearing that Major Caldecott was at home, he delivered the case

with a letter, and waited for an answer. The major opening the letter, found it was dated from the office of the International Commission agents at Hamburg ; it ran as follows—

“SIR,—We have the honor to forward you by special messenger one square leather dressing-case, with Yale lock marked ‘Standard No. 16.’ Please observe that the case is intact and lock unbroken, and sign the enclosed printed form of receipt.

“Yours obediently,

“MULLER, FERGUSON & Co.

“Key with letter of explanation to follow by post.”

The major examined the mysterious case closely, saw that the marks on the lock were correct, signed the receipt and took the case up to his room when he went to bed conscious that its contents could be of no ordinary value for the sender to employ such extraordinary care in its safe delivery. What could it be? That was a question that kept him awake half the night, and caused him to rise an hour earlier than usual the next morning. He was down when the post came in. To his great disappointment there was not a letter with a foreign stamp ; but on opening one with the postmark Queenborough addressed in an unknown hand, he found a small flat nickel Yale key neatly sunk in a card, the card being enclosed in a folded sheet of stout paper.

Impatient to solve the mystery, he quickly slipped the key into the slot of the lock and turned it. The case opened. There was nothing in it except the ordinary fittings of a dressing-case ; and they were not new. He took out the scent bottles, the brushes, the razors, and put them back ; he opened the soap box, took out the half-used cake of old Windsor and put that back ; then stood looking at the open case in mute perplexity. Why was this sent by special messenger from Hamburg? There was nothing in it to tempt any one to dishonesty. A pawnbroker would not have given a pound for the lot.

He picked up the card in which the key had been sunk, and turned it over ; on the back were written a couple of lines in a most legible hand :—

“*Dissolve the soap in hot water, and you will find your*

treasure. If this act of retribution claims consideration for the restorer, make no inquiries as to his identity.

Evelyn, coming into the breakfast room a minute later, was terrified to find her father standing by the open case on the table, pale and shaking with agitation.

"Father!" she exclaimed. The sound of her voice reanimated him.

"Bring me that kettle from the fire," he cried. "Quick! quick! don't ask me why. I daren't tell you yet. I fear almost to put my own hopes to the trial."

In silent obedience to his wishes, she brought him the steaming kettle from the fire.

"Pour it in—cover it," he said, putting before her the slop basin. She looked and paused. Was her father's reason affected? she asked herself, seeing the piece of soap he had carefully laid in the basin.

"Pour! pour!" he cried. "I am not mad; though God help me if this is nothing but a cruel joke." She half filled the basin, covering the soap, and the major plunged in his fingers to rub the soap. At the first touch the water scalded, but he persevered, the perspiration beading his temples. Mrs. Caldecott entered, and stood watching him, at a sign from Evelyn, in mute amazement. From time to time he lifted out the soap and looked at it intently. At last he rushed with it to the window, and scraped away a portion with his nail.

"Great God, it's true!" he cried, with a quivering voice. "Come heré, my wife—come here, my beloved child." He pointed to the glistening facet of crystal. "Some honest man has sent you back your fortune."

CHAPTER XLII.

STILL A CHANCE.

THE other letter posted at Queenborough had reached Lesley by the last post the same night. He read:—

"MY SON—By the time you receive this, Major Caldecott will be in possession of his lost property. When you fully satisfied yourself that I have faithfully executed

my promise, you will, I am sure, be equally expeditious in fulfilling yours. For obvious reasons it is advisable that I should not be seen in London at the present time; I shall therefore leave England the moment our present transaction is concluded, and deny myself, for the present the pleasure of seeing you and the enjoyment of family intercourse. Be careful in drawing your check to make it payable to the order of Ivan Isaakoff, and cross it. Address it, if you please, to Ivan Zassoulitch the Prince's Hotel, Adelphi. On receipt of your enclosure, I will return a full receipt, together with your bond.

"With the most affectionate regards, I am ever

"Your devoted grandfather."

The door bell rang as Lesley the next morning was preparing to go out to lunch. He opened the door, and found that his visitor was Major Caldecott.

"My dear Les', I've wonderful news to tell you," he said, grasping Lesley's hand. "Where's your wife? She must know it as soon as any one. Let me see her, my dear boy—this is no time to stand on ceremony. I take the privilege of an old friend—" Grasping Lesley's hand with a little shake at intervals as he talked he had entered the sitting-room by the open door. Seeing no one in there he stopped abruptly, and then said, "Ah! I see, Mrs. Dunbar is out——"

"No, she is in her room," Lesley answered, with constraint.

"Not ill, I hope?"

"She is not well."

"I can see that by your face, Les', now you stand in the light. I'm afraid it is something very serious." He spoke in a low tone, with earnest solicitude in his genial kind face. Lesley's appearance shocked him. "Why, the poor fellow's a wreck," he said to himself. "I might have passed him on the street without recognizing who it was."

"Yes, it is serious," Lesley answered, pushing a chair to the fireside, and seating himself with his back to the window.

"I dare hardly ask you what is the matter. Your looks show that you are in terrible trouble."

"I am in trouble, and I can hardly tell you more than that."

"I understand, my dear boy. I know what it is to have one's best beloved struck down with illness. One doesn't know what silence is till one ceases to hear the cheerful voice: what loneliness is till you look round and find the dear one gone from her customary place."

Lesley bent forward, setting his elbows on his knees and drooping his face in his hands. His lips twitched as he listened to those words of sympathy. All the morning this aching sense of desolation had been creeping upon him. How many times had he looked round the empty room and held his breath to catch a fleeting sound from the adjoining chamber!

"It isn't at this time that you want a lot of inquisitive old women probing your wound with useless questions and suggestions. Of course you've got the first medical advice to be had, and are taking the best course that is open to you. And all that a friend can do is to join in hoping a happy turn to put an end to your trouble.

"Yes, that is all one can hope for."

Olga, hearing this through the thin door, sank on her bed with clasped hands. To her these words conveyed a prophetic revelation.

"Well, what is your good news?" Lesley asked, bracing himself up.

"My good news? Why, on my honor, I had forgotten it in the pain of hearing bad. It is good news though, and I daresay it will interest your poor wife. I've got my diamond. The most unlooked-for, mysterious thing in the world;" and then he narrated how the treasure had been restored to him, adding, in conclusion, "There's no mistake about it, you know. At first I could hardly believe it was anything but a hoax—a practical joke. Even when I held it in my hand and examined the facets—I knew every one of 'em—I thought it might be a clever imitation. To settle that I caught the first train I could, and brought it to town with me. Took it to Bond Street, and had it examined by an expert. He has routed the last doubts. It's *my* diamond."

Lesley, nursing his knee, looked into the fire, and listened with such apathy in his face that the major could not fail to observe it, and was forced to assume enthusiasm as a mark to conceal the sorrowing sympathy he felt. "A man can't stand pity at such a time as this," he said to himself; "he wants to be left alone. I can say nothing to lessen

his misery. What are all the diamonds in the world compared with some one that we love?"

"Twenty past twelve!" he said, looking at his watch and rising. "There's a train about two from Paddington. I must catch that if I can. I've sent a couple of telegrams home, but they'll be anxious to hear all the particulars from me. St. James's Park is the nearest station, I suppose?"

"Yes. I'll walk there with you," Lesley replied, taking up his hat and opening the door.

The major watched him in pain and wonder. It seemed to him natural that Lesley should go in to see his wife again, even if she were sleeping, before going out; he did not even look towards the other door, and there was no anxiety in his face—no sign of latent hope. "It was as if his wife were already dead and buried," he afterwards said to his wife.

"Mrs. Caldecott and Evelyn—they are quite well?" Lesley asked, as they were going downstairs.

"Never better, Les'. We were all a bit queer down at Naples. No fires, no home comforts of any kind, down there; like heaven getting back to our own fireside again. Oh, there's no place in the world like England for an Englishman. We've only been back a fortnight, you know. You see, we felt it necessary to economize, and forego London this winter; and so when it got cold and the rain set in at Florence, we went down to Naples; always hearing such glowing account of the Mediterranean and Vesuvius, and unclouded skies, and oranges and lemons—not a word about the rain, and the slush, and the cold winds, the smells and the beggars, Lesley. We had a flat in a palazzo—all marble, and not a single fireplace, and there we shivered like frogs in a well till human nature could stand it no longer. You should have seen us going home—like boys after a breaking up—and the fires we made when we got there. I wonder we didn't burn the place down. Every one says how brown and well we look; but it isn't the Italian sun that's done it, my boy, it's Wallsend coal."

"I heard from the Glynnns that you had returned to Pangbourne."

"I have been going to write to you every day since our return. We have all wanted you to come down and see us, for, you know, Les', there's no one in the world we

should be better pleased to have in the house, but seeing by the papers how your time was filled up in attending those 'functions' as the newspaper man call 'em, it seemed almost an empty compliment to invite you to a quiet country home ; at any rate, that's the only excuse I can find for not writing. I'm afraid, Les', you've overdone it a little—overtaxed your poor wife's strength, eh ?”

“ Yes, yes, yes,” Lesley answered, hurriedly ; “ we have overdone it.”

“ It's terribly exhausting, night after night of that sort of thing. And then your wife's professional exertions must be taken into account. Her writing : what admirable work, my boy ! I could never have done it, though I was vain enough to think I could ; and then her singing at those concerts every week. But you will make her repose after this some time ?”

“ Yes, yes,” Lesley said again, impatiently ; “ that's all over.”

“ The spring will soon be here. It's wonderful how the days are lengthening, and the rooks are quite busy up in the elms. I should think, when she is well enough to undertake the journey, a quiet fortnight in your little place at Pangbourne——”

“ I must let the place if I can find any one to take it. I wrote to Barclay about it yesterday. If not, the furniture and things will have to be sold up.”

The major glanced at Lesley, whose utter dejection inspired the gravest apprehensions—

“ Has the doctor ordered you to go to the South, my boy ?” he asked in pitying tones.

“ No, no ; not that. But—well, the fact is, I must sell up of necessity. I—I've got into debt. It's no secret ; all the world must know it.”

“ Is that all, Les' ?” cried the major, joyfully. “ Thank God it's no worse ! I thought your wife was dying.”

He nudged Lesley's arm closer to his side, and continued—

“ One might lose every penny, and never know one's loss looking in one beloved face ; but what could compensate the loss of a sweet wife, loved and respected as yours must be ? How does she take it, my boy ?”

“ She suffers with me.”

“ Of course ; that's only nature. Well, I'm in luck's way, certainly ; for here, the very day I get back my for-

tune, I find the very best means of using it that I could wish for. Is it a big sum you owe?"

"A very large sum indeed."

"Not more than your father and I can manage to cover between us, I'll be bound."

"My father will give me nothing."

"I thought he was reconciled to your marriage. It certainly said so in one of the society papers; I recollect pointing out the paragraph to my wife."

He was silent for a minute, feeling that his reflections on the meanness and hardness of the Right Hon. might not be acceptable to his son's ears. Then he said—

"Well, Les', you must let me help you. It's nonsense to talk about selling your affairs at Pangbourne; the lot wouldn't fetch a couple of hundred."

"You must let me go my own way, major," Lesley answered, shaking his head. "It's a poor return for such kindness as yours to refuse your offer, but I can't help it. I shall pay the debt and suffer by it no more than I deserve. Believe me, I would take your money if it would make my wife or me happier; but it can't do that."

And to all the major's arguments he made substantially the same reply.

"Poor Les'," said the major, in telling his wife; "he's got some of his father's obstinacy, I'm afraid."

After lunch Lesley called upon McAllister, who explained the arrangement he had made with the Right Hon.

"It will save you a couple of hundred a year at the least," he said. "Without your father's concurrence it would have been impossible to raise fifteen thousand at less than seven per cent. I've got the five at six per cent, so that your present liabilities only amount to three hundred a year. Mr. Dunbar told me when he came the other afternoon that he has settled with the bankers, who will hand the ten thousand over to you on demand. I will give you a check for the other five now if it's agreeable to you to write a note of hand."

"Kindly tell me what to say," said Lesley, taking up a pen; and then, at McAllister's dictation, he wrote the note.

"I need not tell you how grateful I feel for your help in this matter," he said, when the transaction was completed and he rose to go.

"Oh, don't mention it. Sit down. It's too small a service to dwell upon. Let us talk of something else. By the way, there's a rumor—I don't know how true it may be—that Major Caldecott's diamond has been found. Have you heard anything about it?"

"Yes; it's perfectly true. I saw the major this morning. He came to tell me that it had been restored to him."

McAllister's surprise on hearing this was not altogether feigned. Not doubting the diamond was to be restored, he had yet wondered how it would be done. Now that it was done he recognized the end of his unfortunate venture, and regarded his own loss on the undertaking with the resignation of a business man who has to put up with a bad debt now and then. It was another surprise, therefore, to find, as he did in twenty-four hours, that his interest in the great diamond had not yet expired.

Adjoining the editorial office was a small, silent room entered by double baize-covered doors. A telephone in this chamber communicated with a similar room in the office at Sandy's Row. On the afternoon after Lesley's visit McAllister was called to the instrument in the Fleet Street room. After an exchange of signals, he asked—

"Who's there?"

The answer came to his ear:—

"Phillips, sir. James Parker wants to speak to X. Y. Z."

"Let him speak."

He waited till the bell rang again; then called—

"What do you want, Parker?"

"The crystal slipped through our hands, sir."

"More fool you to let it slip. Never mind that; what do you want now?"

"Want you to change me a check, sir."

"How much?"

"Fifteen thousand pounds."

McAllister started. In a couple of seconds he spoke again—

"Payable to order and crossed, I suppose, or you would not have come to me."

"Yes, sir."

"Who is the payee—who's it payable to?"

"Ivan Isaakoff."

"Is his name on the back?"

"No, sir."

"It's not worth the paper it's written on without that. If you try to pass it you'll get into trouble."

"I know that, sir. No one knows a word about it yet awhile."

"How did you come by it? Speak out. Tell the truth. Don't waste any time."

"We lost the crystal but we caught the thief, sir. Took him home and searched him. Found a paper in his pocket signed by Mr. Lesley Dunbar promising to pay this money when the crystal was returned to the rightful owner. Knew Zassoulitch was going to the Prince's Hotel; went to the hotel and asked for letters. Got this containing check. That's all, sir, and as true as I'm standing here."

"Where's Zassoulitch now?"

"We've got him, sir"—after a pause.

"Make him sign that check, and I will give four thousand for it. But understand, the check will have to be signed in the presence of Phillips, and handed over to him on the spot. Otherwise I'll have nothing to do with it, and you won't get a halfpenny for your check."

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE BIG IDEA.

"We can't let him go his own way," said the major, after describing his interview with Lesley to his wife and Evelyn; "he ought not to expect it of us. If he were only Smith or Brown or Jones in the village, we couldn't turn our backs on him and let him sink or swim as chance decided. Lesley, who's lived with us all his life—why, he's as much to us as if he were one of our own flesh and blood."

"But if he asks to be let alone, dear," said Mrs. Caldecott.

"That's no reason for letting him alone," replied the major, stoutly. "Every man in trouble wants to be let alone. But there are times when his wishes have to be disregarded. I remember when I was knocked over for the first time and the surgeons found me as I was coming

to after fainting from loss of blood for the second time I said just the same thing. 'For God's sake, let me be,' says I; 'it's all up with me. I don't want to be cut about. Let me be.' Well, where should I be now if my wish had been listened to? How many years of happiness would have been lost! Old Acton, the surgeon, took no more notice of my prayer than if he'd been stone deaf. 'Pick him up, lads, and trundle him off to the amputation tent,' says he, turning to another case."

"Well, I'm sure you could never be such a brute as that horrid surgeon," said Mrs. Caldecott, indignantly.

"That's just it—the very thing that puzzles me. We *must* help him, but how can we do it without hurting his feelings?"

"And Mrs. Dunbar—we must consider her susceptibilities too," said Evelyn.

"To be sure we must."

"I could not abide to see a stranger in poor Lesley's cottage" said Mr. Caldecott. "You won't let anything be sold, will you, Henry?"

"Is it likely, my dear? I settled what I would do about that the moment Les' talked about selling up. Tomorrow I shall run over to Reading, and if the freehold is to be bought I'll buy it. That's nothing. What we have to find out amongst us is how we are to provide him with some reasonable means of earning a living with a decent prospect of paying off his debts."

This was "the very thing"; they agreed to that unanimously, and they set themselves to solve the problem of how it was to be done with all the energy of their generous, expansive dispositions; but a hundred suggestions were made, discussed, and abandoned before the major evolved a "big idea" that promised to meet all requirements. No sooner was his scheme approved of by his wife and daughter than he wrote asking Lesley to meet him the next day (about lunch time) at the United Service Club in order to discuss a pressing matter of business. Lesley accepted the invitation by return of post, and the following morning the major and Evelyn went up to town.

In Regent Street, Evelyn having some purchases to make, left her father, who went on in the hansom.

About one o'clock Evelyn rang the bell of the Dunbars', chambers in Victoria Street, and waited with a little flutter

of expectation. Mrs. Gough opened the door, and knowing Evelyn almost as well as she knew her mother, introduced her without ceremony into the dining-room, where Olga was seated alone at the meagrely furnished table. Bread and butter a dish of fruit, and a caraffe of water constituted her lunch, for now that Lesley no longer shared the repast she pushed economy to its extreme limit.

On the threshold Evelyn stopped instinctively, doubting for the moment if it were really Olga who sat there, so old and careworn and pinched were the delicate features—so changed from the bright, high-spirited, lovely girl she was before marriage. All that was left of her beauty were those large dark eyes, and, oh! how awfully sad they were.

Evelyn hurried forward to embrace Olga that the shock she felt in seeing the great change in her friend's face might not be detected in her own.

"I've been wanting to see you, dear," she began, "ever since we came home—ever since we went away, indeed—to tell you what one never can say in letters. And I thought this would be such a good occasion to have a long chat with you, if it were a chat and nothing else."

"You always were kind—too kind to me," Olga replied, with a tremor in her voice, overcome by the sound of an affectionate voice, the warm pressure of a loving hand. Her heart ached as it expanded with tender emotion, like a cramped limb when the blood again flows freely.

"Lesley is out," she continued, recovering her self-possession; "but I think he will return in about half an hour."

"Oh, no. Papa said he should keep him till three o'clock." Seeing the surprise in Olga's face, she added, "You know that they are taking lunch at 'pa's club.'"

"No. Lesley did not tell me where he was going."

Evelyn had to call all her tact into play to conceal her astonishment and find an excuse for Lesley; for it seemed almost incredible that Lesley—kind old Les—should leave his young wife alone without explaining the reason—and she in such trouble.

"It is an affair of business that papa has to propose, and possibly, Lesley said nothing about it, fearing to raise a hope that might be overthrown. But I will tell

you all about it, for it must succeed. It's one of papa's big ideas. I may speak freely, mayn't I, dear?"

"Oh, do do! I wish there were not such a thing in this world as one concealed thought."

"So do I: it's horrid. I never could keep a secret. Good or bad it must come out at some time and the sooner the better. Well, dear," she continued, taking off her hat, "we know that you are in pecuniary difficulties——"

"One moment," Olga said, with a smile; "I must show you that we are not so poor as we might be."

She went into Lesley's room for the sherry and biscuits she kept there. In her absence Evelyn glanced at the table with mingled feelings of astonishment and pity as she thought of the poor wife sitting down to this miserable fare with not a cheerful voice to charm away her care.

It was but a glance—a momentary reflection; this was no time for sad condolence but for bright and hopeful help. She had whipped off her mantle, and was uncovering a little basket when Olga returned.

"I hope I have not crushed them," she said, removing a sheet of paper. "No—see; they are just as I gathered them this morning."

She put the basket on the table before Olga. It was filled with gay crocus and hanging snowdrops set in moss, and made a patch of fresh and lively color on the cheerless table. Olga bent over them in silence, inhaling the earthy odor of the moss—drinking the breath of new-born hope and happy promise that these first flowers of spring exhaled.

"Where do you think I found them, dear?" said Evelyn. "Guess."

"Oh, I know; they are from our garden; that is why you brought them."

"I did not expect to find anything but a violet or two; it was a surprise to find the border under the terrace full of spring flowers."

"Lesley and I planted them," said Olga, still bending over the flowers, "one morning before the rain came. We liked the border under the terrace better than the others. We looked down on it, leaning on the rail under the verandah. Lesley liked to smoke his pipe there. You could hear the water falling in the weir there and see the river shining through the willows—so many things!"

Her memory was crowded with pictures. "Are there many in that border?"

"Hundreds! And still many more to come."

"When we planted them we thought how pleasant it would be to watch them spring up and open."

She abandoned herself to these memories, almost forgetting that she was not alone. Evelyn, standing by her side, looked down on the flowers too in silence for a moment, respecting her friend's reverie; then slipping her arm around Olga's waist, she said:—

"You were very happy at Pangbourne."

"Oh, if you knew——" she could say no more; but the tear that stole silently down her hollow cheek was more pathetic than any description of lost joys.

"Never mind, dear," said Evelyn, her own eyes filling in sympathy; "you will go there again."

Olga shook her head sadly in silence. She had a presentiment that she should never, never more see the little room with Lesley's chair by the window, the garden below, the river beyond.

"Yes, yes, you will," said Evelyn, eagerly. "Lesley told papa that he must try to get a tenant to take the lease and sell everything. But we couldn't bear to think of that, and——" diving her hand into her pocket and bringing out a long blue envelope with a bulky enclosure—"and mamma asked me to give you this as a wedding present."

Olga took the packet, and looked at her in perplexity. Evelyn continued—

"You need not open it; there's nothing inside that we can understand—title deeds and things, all 'whereases' and 'aforesaid's'—but it means, dear, that the cottage is your own now forever and ever."

"What can I say?" exclaimed Olga, sinking down on the chair beside her. Then looking at the packet in her hand, it flashed upon her that the old, happy life *might* be resumed at Pangbourne, and with the sudden revulsion of feeling she broke into a faint, hysterical laugh.

"Don't say anything until you hear all," said Evelyn. "Oh, that is nothing to what I have to tell. But first of all let me help myself to some sherry and a slice of bread and butter."

Olga, with the confusion of an inexperienced girl, sprang up to do her neglected duty as a hostess. Her hand

trembled with excitement as she lifted the decanter.

"Papa said we might as well give you a white elephant for a wedding present as a house without the means of keeping it up. Mamma and I couldn't see how that was to be done, knowing how sensitive Lesley is about accepting assistance. But papa struck out a brilliant idea—you know how clever he is at that sort of thing—and it just fits in with our wants. He is going to sell that unlucky diamond and invest his money in a new magazine. It's not a new idea quite; he has been talking about starting a newspaper or a magazine ever since I can remember, and he would have started it long ago if he had only known what to call it. But now he's quite resolved to do it, and he has come up to-day to ask Lesley to take the editorship, on the same terms that other editors accept. Lesley can't refuse that unless he has something better in view, especially as he will see that the success must depend very much on your help. Everybody says that *The Month* owes its success to your articles; and of course you would do as much for a magazine in which your husband and papa are interested, wouldn't you?"

"I would do all that is in my power. I would bend every faculty to the work."

"Then it must succeed. You and Lesley will work together so well, and it can all be done at Pangbourne, papa says, except the office routine, and that can be trusted to a sub-editor. Papa's got a lot of ideas to make the magazine appeal to all classes. Besides your articles, there is to be a certain part for political questions. Lesley, you know, is awfully clever on that subject. We have all his articles at home, and papa says they are finer than anything Macaulay ever wrote, in his opinion; and then there will be another part for fiction. Dora, that's the eldest Miss Glynn, has written a three-volume novel which two or three editors have regretted they had not space for. She will let you have that, I know; and ten pages every month will be given to precious stones. Papa will do that of course. In fact there will be something of everything by all the best writers of the day."

Some of these details might have discouraged Olga had her mind been wholly fixed upon the prospects of the new literary venture; but her thoughts were dwelling on the possibility of winning back Lesley's love—of working

again in the little room with the verandah : of trudging out along the Berkshire lane with her arm linked in his, talking about the work to be done in the afternoon. And why should it not be ? It was impossible to live forever as they had been living during these past days and weeks—utterly parted, though living under the same roof. There must be an end to that. And when the wrong she had done was forgiven, must not their happiness be greater than ever it had been before ? For henceforth she should never have any secret to keep from him. There would be no return of that terrible fear of discovery which had made her constrained and ill at ease. Oh, what a perfect season of peace and happiness might come with the young summer !

“Is the rose at the bottom of the garden—by the little gate—budding yet ?” she asked. It was that rose they used to admire coming in from the evening walks.

The question startled Evelyn, whose ideas were altogether on the magazine ; but recovering herself in a moment, she replied—

“Not yet, dear ; but the palm is coming out, like a lot of little shining elf mice on the withies. There will be primroses in the beech woods before long. But you will be down there before then. That brings me to another point. Mamma told me to ask you to come down to us next week.”

“Next week ? ”

“Yes ; papa told us that you had been ill. I can see that. I saw it the moment I came in, but I said nothing, because it doesn't make one feel better to be told one is looking ill.”

“It frightens me to look in the glass and see how much I have changed.”

“For the same reason you will be glad to look in it again soon. In a week you will be as beautiful as ever. I look a perfect fright when I've been away from Pangbourne a month or two. Lesley will want time to think about this proposal—men always do ; but he can think just as well down there as here, in this foggy town. You will come next week, won't you ? ”

“I will ask Lesley,” Olga replied, gravely. “Yes, I will speak to him when he comes home.”

CHAPTER XLIV.

THE RETURN OF LOVE.

For some time after Evelyn's departure, Olga sat before the fire nursing this new hope, giving free play to her imagination, and letting it flit like a summer moth from flower to flower in a golden perspective, and before her courage had time to fail, she rose to prepare for Lesley's return. She would break the dreadful silence again and appeal to him for love. Oh, if he would listen to her, and forgive her, and take her back once again into his arms! Evelyn's affectionate intercourse had reanimated her heart and inspired it with a yearning for more love—for the love which was more to her than life.

She arranged the spring flowers in a deep plate, carried it into Lesley's room, and set it on his table; and by the side she laid her wedding present—the papers that made the cottage hers. And thinking he might choose to go in there as soon as he came home—for he passed most of his time there now—she lit his reading lamp and put more coal on the fire. Then in her own living room she pulled down the blinds, but she left the gas unlit, thinking that her face would look less hard and old in the fire-light.

When she heard his key in the door, she rose from her chair and stood by the table—her heart beating fast as she strove to bring her tumultuous ideas under control. She feared him.

He bowed to her and walked towards his room. At the piano he stopped, and changing his intention, put down his hat, seated himself, and looked into the fire, slowly drawing off his gloves. He, too, felt that he must speak.

There was neither hope nor fear in his face—no sign of repressed enthusiasm—nothing but dejection and chilling apathy. Under that numbing influence the beating of Olga's heart quickly subsided; tender emotion could not

exist in that cold atmosphere. His face was hardly less hopeless than her voice when she spoke.

"Have you accepted Mr. Caldecott's offer?" she asked.

"No," he answered, without turning his eyes from the fire.

"When *The Month* came out you said you would like to edit a magazine."

"I thought so then."

It was not the only illusion he had lost. What unbounded faith he had in others at that time, and in himself! He had felt then that he could do anything: now he could do nothing. His brain seemed to have lost its faculty for intellectual work. He could not frame a sentence satisfactorily even in an ordinary letter. He was unable to concentrate his thought upon a book, and after reading for an hour would fling it aside, conscious that not an idea had been grasped.

"But you will accept it, Lesley; we must do something."

"That is true: we must do something, but not at the expense of our friends. There are hundreds of men who can edit the major's magazine well; I—" he checked the bitter reflection that was on his tongue, and rising, added, shortly "I am unfit."

He was silent for a minute; then, with one foot on the fender, his elbow on the chimney-piece he turned to Olga and said—

"Miss Caldecott has been here."

"Yes; she has only been gone an hour."

"When did she come?"

"Not long after you went out."

"Why did she stay here so long?"

"Because her heart is affectionate and good, Lesley."

There was an accent of reproach in Olga's trembling voice.

"Did you tell her what you are?"

"I do not understand what you mean."

"Did you tell her that you helped to rob her father—that you are an adventuress?"

"No," Olga answered, shaking her head, and speaking in a hushed tone, "I did not tell her that."

"You should have done so. What passed between you?"

"She told me all her father had proposed for our advantage. She gave me an invitation from her mother to go and stay with them."

"What reply did you give?"

"I promised to ask you."

"Had you any doubt what my reply would be?"

"I thought—I hoped that you would accept the invitation."

After regarding her in silence for a moment, he said in a harsh voice—

"Have you no sense of honor?"

Olga started under this cruel cut; then with the memory of her shame her spirit bowed in humble resignation to the rod. Lesley continued—

"What right have you to accept kindness from these friends before you know if they can forgive your offence? What right have you to suppose that I would take advantage of their ignorance to introduce you again in their home as a woman worthy of their friendship? Have I sunk so low in your esteem by avoiding public exposure of this shame that you think me capable of wilfully practising upon them the deception you practised upon me?"

"I did not think of these things. It was so much to hear a kind voice—so good to hope."

"Common prudence should have shown you the folly of hope. Where is your grandfather? He has not acknowledged the receipt of his payment. That is immaterial. He has taken the money from the place it was sent to. He is under no necessity to leave London now. We shall see him again. He is only waiting till we have paved the way to some fresh villainy."

"If I had thought of that I should not have been fool enough to hope. It is true. You cannot take me there. And yet we cannot live like this; we must have friends."

"Not such friends as those."

"Let us go away," said Olga, with reviving energy. "Nothing ties us to England. In another country we may live another life."

"It must come to that," Lesley admitted, in a tone of resignation, but with bitter resignation as he called to mind his father's prophecy that they must go abroad and herd with other social outlaws.

"We cannot exist here in this way. It is unnatural, irrational!" Olga exclaimed, "We shall grow hard and

wicked and callous to each other's suffering if we persevere in this terrible course. We shall come to hate each other. I will not believe that you hate me yet. I cannot think that all hope is lost. On, Lesley, Lesley," she continued with growing fervor, "my punishment is more than I can bear. I cannot harden my heart to suffer more. I must die if you do not forgive me. Surely I deserve some mercy, though my sorrows fail to move you to pity. Listen to me patiently for a few minutes. If you cannot forgive me now, I will appeal no more. I have told you all my offence without one extenuating plea, trusting to your love for my excuse. Judge me with the charity of a friend. Say that I became your wife through fraud, but think that you had asked me to be your wife before; say that I accepted your offer to save myself from infamy and destitution, but think that no mercenary feeling was in my heart when I refused a fortune to renounce you; say that I have done many things that are wrong, but think how your wife has struggled to do right; say that I have been weak, but think, Lesley, that I am a woman."

Looking at his wife as she stood by the table with outstretched, trembling hands and with passionate entreaty in her wasted face, Lesley wondered why her appeal failed to move his heart. His reason told him that she was to be pitied, yet he felt that he could not consciously express a feeling that did not exist in his breast. He could not explain to himself what had happened. He only knew that something within him was wanting—that his soul, like some delicate instrument unstrung, responded no longer to the touch that, but a little while ago, drew forth its gentlest strains.

"I have thought of all these things," he said, coldly. "In your place I doubt if I should have been wiser or stronger or better in any way; and yet——"

"And yet you punish me."

"Not intentionally. I have no right, no wish to punish you. All vengeful feeling passed away with the madness of disillusion. I bear you no resentment, Olga; if I can lessen your unhappiness I will. I have been unable to think; but now I begin to see things clearer. We will go away from England——"

"Lesley, Lesley," she cried, interrupting him, "take me in your arms and make me happy now."

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He made no movement. He could neither tell nor act a lie.

"I am your wife," she continued, quivering with passion. "You shall not treat me as if I were nothing to you. If you cannot take me to your heart, strike me to your feet." She tottered towards him, but midway her limbs gave under her, and she sank upon her knees. "Here, on my knees, I ask you to strike. I have done wrong : punish me."

"Be reasonable ; you contradict yourself," he said, stepping forward.

"I do contradict myself. I asked you to punish me no more ; now I implore you to punish me still more. I cannot be reasonable. My madness has not passed away. I love you still."

He stooped to raise her from the ground. She caught his hands in hers, and looking up in his face with impassioned fervor, murmured—

"Kiss me, Lesley, if you love me."

"I cannot kiss you," he replied. "My love is dead."

She flung his hands away without a word, struggled alone to her feet, and with a backward glance of abhorrence passed into her room.

For some time Lesley stood where Olga had left him, inert with a horrible feeling of moral impotency akin to the physical sensation of a sleeper whose limbs refuse to answer to his will. What could he do to revive his love for Olga if his love indeed were dead ? he asked himself as he went to his room.

Closing the door he took from the shelf the first book that came to hand, and threw himself in the chair by the table. Then turning his head as he put out his hand to draw the reading lamp to his side his eyes fell on the dish of spring flowers ; his hand, forgetting its purpose, felt on the table. At first he regarded them without sentiment—his eyes simply fascinated by the patch of bright color ; presently one hanging snowdrop centred his attention. The book slipped from his hand, and he drew the plate towards him to examine it more closely—moved by some vague curiosity to know how the bell was attached to the stem. The earthy smell of the moss brought the beech woods to his recollection ; then the crocuses recalled past mornings of early spring. His heart began to ache—he

knew not why. He bent down and drew a long breath of the delicate odor.

"She put them here for me," he said to himself, "to give me pleasure."

Now the spring flowers and Olga were in his mind. The freshness and sweetness and beauty of the flowers were hers as he saw her before misery came to blast her young life. He looked away from the blooms; he could not bear to think that they must fade and wither. His glance fell on the packet, and he took it up. It was unopened. He tore the end of the long blue envelope and drew out the enclosure. At a glance he knew what it was. It was given to her, and she had laid it here for me, with the flowers, he reflected.

Then the flowers, the cottage, and Olga were mingled in his mind. He saw her again in her light dress and garden hat, bending beside him over the border in the garden, and felt the touch of her fingers as she handed him a bulb to plant, heard her rippling laughter as Rags, broken loose again, rushed on to the scene, playing havoc with the beds they had prepared for planting. What days of happiness and joy they were—unclouded by one captious word, one sombre look from her! And was that joy lost forever? Would he never again feel that he had all the world could bestow in her love? Reason answered that his heart would not be wrung with the sense of loss unless he still loved the thing he grieved to lose. Then the conviction dawned upon him that his love was not dead; that his heart still yearned towards his wife; and that in time her love would give fresh joy to life.

He drew the flowers closer to him, circling the dish with his arms, bending over them with spread nostrils, and the hot blood glowing in his face—clinging deliriously to the idea of still existing love with the tenacious instinct of self-preservation, for that alone could make life worth having. The flowers gave him new life—restored vitality to his better nature. They carried him back to the days of happiness, and losing sight for the first time since misfortune had beset him of his immediate surroundings, he ceased to suffer from their demoralizing influence. A tremendous pressure was removed. He breathed again freely and healthfully.

"There is nothing in the world worth having but love," he said.

What if he had to renounce family, friends, position, and all the artificial pleasures of society? The natural delights of spontaneous love would more than compensate the loss. This renunciation would bring happiness, not only to him, but to the woman who loved him. There was relief for both within his grasp; by a word he could end their maddening misery.

"She is there in the next room," he said, springing to his feet. "She shall know that I, too, love still."

CHAPTER XLV.

OLGA SINGS FOR THE LAST TIME.

LESLEY opened the door of his room brusquely, and then, with the handle still in his hand, stopped, appalled by a sudden perception of the immense consequences involved in the irrevocable act he was about to perform. It was not what he and Olga also eventually must suffer from the moral degradation of exile that terrified him, but the consideration that children might spring from this union who must blush for their mother.

Swayed alternately by passion and principle, he stood for some moments by the open door, irresolute; then, led by the higher feeling of duty, he slowly retraced his steps, and dropped again into his chair by the table. A revulsion came as his eyes fell once more on the flowers, and laying his arms on the table before them, he dropped his face in his hands, with an appeal to Heaven for guidance.

"My God! what shall I do?" he groaned.

The fierce sense of injustice under which Olga had revolted against Lesley's treatment passed away, and gradually gave place to feelings of a more reasonable kind.

"Why should I be angry with poor Lesley because just now he does not love me as I love him?" she asked herself. "It does not depend upon his will. Our hearts are not machines that we can make go or stop as we will. My own shows that. When we are hungry, we eat; but *appetite* will not come when we want it. How can he

love when his mind is distracted by misfortunes, and how can I expect him to love me, who have brought all these misfortunes upon him? He cannot feel as I do. Our lots are not the same. I have lost nothing that belonged to me; but everything that was his by right—father, friends, the respect of the world, fortune, future—everything has been lost, and through me. His love was not of a base kind: he loved me for my better qualities, and if it seems to him that his love was misplaced and I have no better qualities, what is there left to love? Why, I have not even beauty now to charm his senses.

"Men have lost their reason under a slighter shock than this—none could recover from such a blow in a few weeks; it may be months before he loves me again. Oh, I am grateful that he did not listen to my prayer! Now, when he opens his arms to me, I shall know that he wants me to come to them. And he will take me in them again! He said his love was dead; it seemed so to him, but it cannot be. His nature is too strong to change so quickly.

"I must be patient and wise. If I am not a fool, he will see little by little that I have good in me; that his faith was not really misplaced; that I have been more sinned against than sinning. I shall grow happier with patient striving to do right, and with happiness my temper will grow sweeter and my prettiness, may be, will come back with the chastened look of those who have passed through great sorrow."

At that moment she heard the door of Lesley's room open. Thinking he intended to go out, she rose quickly to her feet, under the impulse of her heart. She must have given him pain. If she could she would lessen the trouble she had caused. She would tell him she repented her violence; tell him of her resolution to be patient and reasonable; tell him that she did not expect him to love her yet, and would henceforth strive only to do right and win his affection by submission and self-control.

With these resolutions she gently opened her door and entered the adjoining room. Finding that Lesley was not there, she crossed to the open door of his room, and looked in. She saw him, with his face buried in his hands; there was such grief and despair in his attitude as she had never seen him exhibit before. What did it mean? It was irreconcilable with the cold apathy he had shown in repelling her advances. It was inconceivable that he should

change in so brief a space of time. Suddenly she started, stifling a cry of pain as the conviction flashed upon her that Lesley was thinking, not of her, but of Evelyn. The flowers had been moved; his hand touched them; the packet had been opened; his arm rested on that paper; he looked upon them as a gift left for him by Evelyn, and they told him what he had lost, beside position and fortune, in marrying another.

Olga, trembling and dazed like one rising too soon from a sick bed, tottered back to her room, and threw herself upon the bed.

"It is true! it is true!" she murmured. "His love for me is dead; but for her his love lives again."

It was natural—quite natural, she said to herself when the paroxysm of grief subsided and she could reason calmly. He had loved Evelyn all his life, and would have made her his wife had not his affection been alienated. And Olga he had loved also, until in turn his love had been killed by the discovery of her fault. Then freed from the spell her charms had thrown over him, his heart had turned again to the honest, innocent English girl.

This accounted for everything—his apathy, his gloomy silence, his frigid constraint. He could not love two. He was too sincere for that; and since he could no longer love her, his heart had turned again to Evelyn.

Well, how would it end? Every malady must have its course and reach a crisis, beyond which suffering ceases: the patient dies or recovers. With the hope that even the dying cherish to the last, Olga thought recovery still possible. She knew that Lesley would never betray his love to Evelyn. She knew that Evelyn would regard such love with horror, if it were betrayed—that was the character of these English; she knew also that Lesley would not encourage his love for Evelyn, but endeavor, with all the energy of principle and good feeling, to make his wife's lot endurable, and in course of time they would be able to live together in a simple state of contentment. Oh, yes, they would recover; but what a wretched existence must it be without that full and perfect love that makes life beautiful and strong!

When she found Lesley's room empty the next morning, she said—

"He has gone to Pangbourne to say why I cannot be

their guest. He will tell them that I am not a fit friend for Evelyn. I wish I had spared him that shame."

Had Lesley been there his wife's humility and sorrow must have overcome the last effort to resist the natural impulse of his awakened sympathy. Aware of his weakness, fearing her influence, and still striving to maintain the course dictated by principle, he had left home, still haunted by the dreams of his unrestful sleep, not daring to encounter the regard of Olga's mournful eyes. And now he was wandering where accident guided his steps, endeavoring to find some practical issue from the difficulties that surrounded him. The difficulties were greater now that returning love barred the way to separation. His mind was less capable of adopting stoic measures now that passion sapped his will. Some vague motion floated in his imagination of going away for some months, and leaving his wife upon her own resources, thinking that in his absence she might form a new circle of acquaintances, which would reconcile her to a longer and more indefinite period of separation. Putting himself in her place, he felt that it would be more endurable to live friendless and in perpetual solitude than under the unnatural conditions he had imposed.

In the evening as he proceeded along Piccadilly in a state of mental abstraction, he was stopped by a crowd outside the St. James's Hall. Lifting his eyes, Lesley saw upon the wall a printed announcement of a concert, and his wife's name in large letters. He was seized with an intense desire to hear Olga sing.

"Perhaps I may never hear her sing again," he said to himself, with a terrible presentiment of the truth.

He paid for a cheap seat, where he might not be recognized, and went in with the stream of visitors. With irritable impatience he sat through the opening part of the concert. To his ear every voice was harsh, and out of tune—every song intolerably tedious. When the ballad preceding Olga's appearance came to an end, his nervous excitement took another form. The wild beating of his heart stifled respiration. There seemed to be no air to breathe. He sat immovable, straining his eyes upon the platform where she was to come as if some tragic act was in preparation.

As soon as Olga was seen coming down to the front, the whole audience welcomed her; but the applause sub-

sided as suddenly as it had burst forth when she passed the musicians and stood face to face with the spectators. The light and life were gone from her face ; her bearing had lost its pride and youth. She was but the wasted shadow of herself. Those who knew her were shocked by the change in her appearance, and even those who had never seen her before perceived that she was not in a condition to sing in public.

"Why, she doesn't even smile," whispered some one in front of Lesley.

There was something terrible in her impressive attitude, and the awful sadness of her eyes.

"Quite a wreck. I'm afraid she will break down," was the whispered answer.

Olga sang a Russian cradle song. In happier days the mist would gather in Lesley's eyes as he listened to his wife's touching expression of the young mother's yearning hope and embracing love ; now the tears ran down his face because of the utter absence of emotion in her voice. To sing like that all joy and hope must have gone from her heart. Those who observed his agitation wondered what there was in the song to move him like that. Olga had failed to awaken their sympathy altogether ; she had not even broken down.

There was scarcely any applause as Olga left the platform—a feeble attempt on the part of her personal friends : that was all.

Olga was to sing again, but Lesley would not stay to hear her. It tortured him to think of her going again through this ordeal. She, too, must realize that her hold on the public was gone—that the crowds who had made her their idol would presently cease to listen patiently to her voice.

"Regular smash up !" "It's all up with her !" "Melancholy exhibition !" "Sooner she retires the better !" "Not likely to have any more of Mrs. Dunbar !"

These were some of the comments that Lesley caught as he pushed his way out.

When he got into the street, all doubt as to the course he should take was gone from his mind. No consideration of principle or anything else should induce him to abandon his wife to this crushing misery.

CHAPTER XLVI.

A DECISION.

THE Right Hon. was passing with measured steps through the dingy station of the Metropolitan Railway at Westminster Bridge on his way to the House when he received an unpleasant shock, which caused him to stop abruptly. Upon the wall was a railway advertisement of a route to Southern Italy, with highly colored illustrations of the most attractive stopping places, and a young man was standing before it so like Lesley in some respects that at the first glance the Right Hon. thought it was he; so unlike him in others that the next moment he doubted if it could be his son. Feeling himself under observation, the young man turned, and, without any change in the expression of his pinched and haggard features, held out his hand, and said—

“Father!”

The Right Hon. took his son's hand and held it in silence for a moment as he looked with unwonted pain in his face. Then he said—

“What are you doing here, Lesley?”

“I came in to look at this advertisement, sir, and I was thinking that Capri would be a good place to go to.”

“Yes, very pleasant for those who have leisure—and money.”

“I think I shall go there,” Lesley observed, turning again to the bill without noticing his father's objection.

“You will come and see me beforehand, I suppose.”

“I intended to find you either to-night or to-morrow morning in order to say good-bye!”

“I have an hour's work in the House. Go to Gloucester Place and wait till I return.”

Lesley acceded to the proposal, and when the Right Hon. reached home an hour or two later he found him seated in the library, studying a Baedeker. The Right

Hon. had entered unheard, and stood at the door regarding him, as he silently drew off his gloves, with dismal apprehension. Lesley's unkempt hair, his creased linen, his unbuttoned coat had a significance to his eyes only less distressing than the signs of physical unhealthiness in the sallow skin and hollow cheek.

He closed the door, and crossing the room to lay his gloves in their customary place, made some observation on the public question of the day, as if that were uppermost in his thoughts.

"Well, Lesley," he said, when he had seated himself in his easy chair, "so you think of going away."

"Yes, sir; there are several reasons that render it necessary as well as advisable."

"For example——"

"To give you the first that comes to my mind. The Caldecotts are pressing us to visit them. Other friends may make the same advances. They will force me to tell a lie about my wife—or the truth."

"Neither is advisable, certainly. What arrangements have you made with regard to your wife?"

"She will go with me."

"Ah, it has come to that!"

"I cannot leave her without a friend. Her position is worse than mine."

"So is the position of many other male-factors."

"I am willing to admit that I am guided by feeling. But—I shall stick to her."

"As long as she will stick to you, eh? How long do you think that will be?" He paused for a reply, and getting none, continued: "I will tell you. It will be just as long as the novelty of change lasts, and no longer. You are putting yourself to expense, which you can ill afford just now, to stave off for a few weeks or months—the inevitable."

"If you mean that at the end of two or three months we shall separate, you are mistaken."

"You think it possible that you will live abroad with your wife till the end of your life?"

"Yes."

"Do you intend to repudiate your debts?"

"Certainly not. Why should you think that?"

"Because I do not see how you are to pay them. Your liabilities amount to two or three hundred a year;

your expenses will be two or three hundred more. How will you make five hundred a year at Capri? That is not a matter for after-consideration. In every undertaking the first question that should present itself to an honest man is, 'Can I afford it?' Evidently that has not entered your mind at all, and it is only to be accounted for by some state of utter demoralisation."

Lesley made no reply, and, after an interval of silence, the Right Hon. continued—

"If your happiness or welfare depended on the execution of this scheme, you may be sure that I would pay your debts and make a suitable provision for your subsistence. But that is not the case. Your happiness and welfare depend on your separation from this woman, who is ruining your life. For that reason I will not support in any way a project which involves your living with her. I will encounter even the disgrace of your defalcation rather than lend assistance to a scheme which my conscience condemns."

"Father, I love my wife!" Lesley exclaimed, in a broken voice.

"Then you must consider her feeling in this matter. Is her happiness likely to be increased by exile on a Mediterranean rock? I doubt it. Do you know her views?"

"I have not seen her since I came to this decision."

"I thought you had not consulted her. She would have saved me the trouble of pointing out your folly. I could suggest an arrangement which would be far more acceptable to her."

"For God's sake let me know it then!" cried Lesley, with sudden animation.

"I would propose to let you have your own way about going to Capri or anywhere else you like out of England, and pay her ten pounds a week to stay in London."

"If she could do that!" Lesley exclaimed, starting under the sting of a jealous suspicion.

"If she would take ten pounds a week to stay in London, you could go to Capri."

"To the devil—anywhere!"

"It is too late to call upon Mrs. Dunbar to-night; but if your resolution holds good till to-morrow morning, Lesley, I will make this offer, on condition that you stay in this house till I bring her answer. I cannot give her

the opportunity of repeating that *coup de théâtre* by which she upset my former attempt to save you."

Lesley accepted the offer.

Between twelve and one o'clock next morning the Right Hon. called to see Olga, and was shown into the sitting-room by Mrs. Gough. Almost simultaneously Olga, in her dressing-gown and with her hair neatly knotted on her head, entered from her chamber.

"Where is Lesley?" she faltered, grasping the back of a chair for support.

"I left him half an hour ago in Gloucester Place. There is no cause for alarm."

"Thank God!" murmured Olga, dropping in the chair.

She had last seen Lesley bending over Evelyn's flowers, broken down, as she believed, by the despairing memory of the long-loved girl who should have been his wife. Mrs. Gough had found his room empty when she came down in the morning. Since then he had not come home. In the night a horrible fear had flashed upon the unhappy wife's mind that Lesley had put an end to his wretched life—a fear suggested perhaps by a mental tendency to regard self-destruction as the only conclusion to her own misery.

The Right Hon. had prepared his mind for a theatrical display of emotion; but prejudiced and suspicious as he was, he had to admit to himself that no artifice could supply the signs of physical suffering he found in Olga's wasted face. After giving her a few moments to recover, he said—

"I have come to speak to you about my son. We will discuss the subject at once if it is agreeable to you."

"I can think of nothing else—it is everything to me."

"Lesley finds that existence under the present conditions is no longer possible."

"Why, no. It must end. A man and his wife cannot live together without sympathy—without love."

"That is precisely my opinion," said the Right Hon. in his blandest tone, not a little astonished to find the way smoothed by one from whom he had expected nothing but obstruction. "You are a woman of the world, and see things very clearly; Lesley is less practical, and has led himself to believe that you and he could live together with a slight modification of existing circumstances."

"What modifications do you mean?" Olga asked, eagerly.

"He believes that some sort of *modus vivendi* could be established if you were to live together in another country—in the south of Italy, for example."

"I understand," said Olga, and thinking that Lesley's object was to remove himself from Evelyn, she added, tenderly, "He is always good. He would sacrifice everything for principle."

The Right Hon. coughed to avoid a direct reply, Olga's observation being less indicative of clear sight than it might have been if she had seen that he would sacrifice even principle for love of her.

"Living abroad would rather aggravate than remove the evil," he said. "All that Lesley has ever earned in England does not amount to a hundred pounds; and it is simply absurd to suppose that he could make five or six hundred a year abroad. You might help him, to be sure, by writing."

Olga shook her head hopelessly.

"Society has made me successful," she said. "Society will forget me in a few weeks and set some one else up in my place. I have written under another name, and my article has been returned. I cannot even sing now; to-night I may be hissed. Many have better voices than mine, and what else have I to charm people with? Look at me—my beauty has gone; my spirit is broken; I have no heart to be gay. They will laugh at me abroad. I could not expect to help Lesley."

"You will recover a great deal of what you have lost when the cause of your present unhappiness is removed."

"It cannot be removed. I shall not be happy again," said Olga, in a tone of melancholy conviction.

"Pardon me, I think you may. But not while you live with Lesley, for several reasons. If Lesley fails to meet his obligations, he will be known as a defaulter. That will compel him to live apart from honest people."

"He must do that, even without any fresh degradation. If he cannot take me with him to visit people of his own class in England, he cannot do so elsewhere."

"Perfectly true!" exclaimed the Right Hon. "And the result would be that you would be thrown completely on one another, with what feeling of remorse and bitter self-reproach you may imagine."

"I have imagined it. A day would come when he must hate me. It must not be."

"One must consider also the influence of such a life upon your family."

"I might have children"—there was such pathetic tenderness in Olga's voice as she spoke that the Right Hon. turned uneasily in his chair—"little ones whose questions I could not answer. I have thought of that. One can think so much in a night!"

"Happily these greater misfortunes may be obviated."

"Tell me how," said Olga, with only a little tremor in her voice.

"By separation."

Olga drooped her head without any other sign of emotion. She had thought of this also in the night!

"I have offered to make a suitable provision for you," continued the Right Hon., "and to free Lesley from his debts, on condition that you live in England whilst he goes abroad."

"I shall still be his wife," said Olga, thinking of Evelyn.

"For a certain period, yes. But after a lapse of time—seven years, I believe—you will be able to sue for a divorce."

"Seven years—that is a long while."

"You will still be a young woman then. The provision I make will be in the form of an annuity. After the divorce you will be free to marry again."

She looked at him without anger. It was natural, she said to herself, that he should think of her less kindly than he would of another woman, and attribute worldly selfishness to her.

"What does Lesley say to this proposal?" she asked, her lips trembling.

"He will accept the conditions if you do."

"Not otherwise?"

"No."

She turned away, for the tears were blinding her. She was thinking only of Lesley. Seven years—it was long for one to live without love: one's heart would break in less time.

The tears had fallen when she rose.

"I will release him," she said without raising her head.

At that moment Mrs. Gough came in to tell Olga that the fly was at the door. Latterly Olga had refused no

engagement offered her, and to-day she was to sing at an afternoon concert at Hanover Square.

"You are going out ; I will not detain you," said the Right Hon., rising. "When may I see you again to conclude the arrangement ?"

"To-night."

"Shall we say seven o'clock ?"

"Yes."

The Right Hon. paused, hat in hand.

"Lesley may insist on hearing this decision from your own lips," he said.

"You can bring him with you," and then, covering her face with her trembling fingers, she added, "It will be all the same to me, then."

Mrs. Gough, venturing timidly to enter the room half an hour later, found her mistress sitting with three tear-stained letters in her lap—all that Lesley had ever found occasion to write to her—still in her dressing-gown.

"It's past one, if you please, ma'am, and the fly man has sent up twice."

"I had forgotten," said Olga, going to the side table for writing materials. "Would you like to go to a concert this afternoon ?"

"Oh, thank you, ma'am. I'm that fond of music, and so is Polly."

"Take her with you," said Olga, as she wrote ; "you can go in the fly. Give this letter to the man at the entrance. He will pass you in."

"Oh, shan't we hear you sing, ma'am ?"

"No, Mrs. Gough," said Olga, giving the letter she had written. "I shall never sing again."

CHAPTER XLVII.

AN ALTERNATIVE.

As the door closed on Mrs. Gough and her niece, Olga rose from her seat, the mere sound serving as an incentive to action.

She was quite alone now, free to dispose of herself as

she would. But there was no necessity for haste : some hours must elapse before Lesley came for his release. With that reflection she stopped in the middle of the room and looked around her slowly, her eyes dwelling first on one familiar object then on another as they brought fresh reminiscences to her mind. There was scarcely a thing which did not awake some tender memory. She passed into her bedroom, and there, silent and motionless, reviewed the past through the medium of things that came under her lingering regard. The dress she was to have worn at the concert lay upon a chair. She remembered the night she wore it for the first time—how Lesley held her at arms' length while he admired her in it : held her there, devouring her with his eyes, till his patience gave way, and he drew her to him with a cry of joy, and pressed her to his breast. The dress was old now ; she had worn it so often that it was seamy and faded. How many times she had said, " I must buy myself a new one," but put off the expense for the sake of economy. Ah, well ! there was no need to buy another now.

The wardrobe door stood open ; there hung the dress Lesley had chosen for her at Reading. He liked that too. When they were going for a scramble in the woods and she had been in doubt as to which she should wear he had said, " Wear the dear old gray, love." What would he do with it when she was gone, Olga wondered. And that trifle she had bought him for his birthday with a secret fear that he might include it in the category of dispised gimcracks—he had never failed to hang his watch in it while they were one, and what kindness there was in the humor with which he spoke of it from time to time.

In this survey, which lasted but a few minutes, more pictures came into the poor, unhappy woman's mind than would fill the longest romance. There was something of Lesley and happiness in everything she saw, and the word " farewell " lay aching in her heart. What a farewell ! Not the farewell of one who hopes to see the beloved face again, but a farewell irrevocable and eternal.

It was over. She had revisited the past and come back to the present after a brief spasm of fainting agony, in which she fondly believed that her life would pass away without further effort. She was in Lesley's room now ; the blinding passion of tears which had sprung from her overcharged heart was passed, and she felt more reason-

able—better prepared to do what yet remained to complete her expiation.

Better to get it over quickly, she thought, before some fresh outburst of emotion weakened her hand and its purpose. How was it to be done? she asked herself, looking round the room again, but swiftly this time. It mattered little how, provided that the instrument was sure. There used to be a long Spanish stiletto on Lesley's desk which he employed as a paper knife: that would do.

She opened the desk and looked in. The stiletto was not in the open space there. She glanced round the room again, and failing to see what she sought she asked herself what she could use instead. Then she recollected that Lesley, sitting before the desk one day, had turned, holding up a little phial, which he said contained enough laudanum to kill two men. If she could find that it would serve better than the stiletto. She could die without even a few minutes pain: she would sleep into eternity. The idea of sleep—a long, long, unwaking sleep without dreams, with nothing but forgetfulness, was grateful to her, and she turned again to the desk in this new quest. There were two drawers which she had never hitherto opened; she might open them now to find the poison. Lesley would forgive her that. A key was in one of them; she opened the drawer. On the top lay the packet Evelyn had brought. Olga took it out quickly and put it aside that her thoughts might not again return to the cottage at Pangbourne.

"He will know one day that Evelyn brought that for me, not for him," she said to herself; "that I laid it on the table for him—not she."

Below lay a photograph. Turning it over she found it was a portrait of Evelyn. A little pang of jealousy shot through her heart, but it faded away as she looked on the bright, open face of that generous friend who had renounced Lesley for her sake partly, whose sympathy and loving kindness had never wavered.

"You, too, have suffered, dear," she said to herself, still looking at the portrait; "but you have not sinned as I have. You may smile again. He will come to you when I am no more. Be happy, dear"—she kissed the face—"farewell!"

She replaced the photograph and laid the packet where she had found it, wondering if Lesley would live again in

in the cottage, and sit on the terrace with Evelyn by his side, and Rags stretched out in the sun at his master's feet. Then she closed the drawer, sure that Lesley would not keep poison there.

Opening the other drawer she found the phial at once, and by the side of it lay the checks she had laid on his table during the past few weeks. They were her earnings.

"He will not touch them," she said; "they have passed through my dishonest hands."

She turned from the desk with the phial in her hand. But now that she had the means to put an end to her life she hesitated to employ them. No moral scruple with regard to self-destruction checked her. She had no fear of death. Under the benumbing influence of pain and remorse her nature only asked for eternal sleep with the craving of those who sink exhausted in the snow. Her reluctance to end the troubles of her life by suicide was due to a purely unselfish consideration.

"They will find me lying here dead when they come," she had said to herself; and then, as a natural sequence, she asked herself, "What will Lesley do when he speaks to me in vain, when he feels that my hand is stiff and cold, and my heart no longer beats? Will he be grateful for his release—pleased that I have released him? Oh, no! the shock will shake off his apathy. He will think of me as I was in old times; the tender, kind feeling will return to his heart. Then, when he finds that I have killed myself, he will start back in horror; he must realize how much I have suffered, how much I have loved, to do this. He will say I have killed myself for his sake—that he has driven me to suicide. If he had killed himself I should say that"—she herself started in horror at the image presented by her imagination, and for a moment lost all power to reason. Then she continued, taking up the broken thread—"and the belief would destroy my reason. If I recovered, the memory of his dead body would haunt me to my last day; my life would be embittered with such self-reproach that I could taste no sweetness in anything. I should never smile again. Is his conscience less sensitive than mine, his heart less susceptible? No, no! What I should suffer he must suffer. It is not release I should give him by this act, but life-long bondage. He would be linked forever to a dead wife—chained to the

woman whose death he had caused. If I hated him and wished for vengeance I could inflict no punishment greater than this I have thoughtlessly meditated in the name of love. Am I a fool and wicked as well?" The phial slipped from her hand and fell on the floor.

She clasped her chill, damp hands in mute supplication to some external power for light and guidance, and as her agitation subsided, began to reason again.

"I must accept that proposal. There is no alternative. He shall go. It will be for his good to travel and see new countries, and I will stay here. I will accept every condition. What right have I to pride? If the father offers me money, I will take it. But I will still save. All that I get shall be put aside to pay my debt. He cannot refuse it when the time comes. It cannot be long—oh, no, not long!"

Her hands were clasped again in supplication as she repeated the words "not long!" She sank in a chair and sat absorbed in sombre reflections, until the tingling of the door bell suddenly aroused her. Had they come already, impatient of delay in their anxiety to conclude the bargain for release? Opening the door, she found not her husband or his father, but a short, spare old gentleman with a short-cut gray beard, standing before her. He was dressed in a closely buttoned coat, and neatly gloved. He removed his hat, and held it on a level with his shoulder as he addressed her after bowing—

"Mrs. Lesley Dunbar," he said, "may I ask you to give me an interview of a few minutes?"

Olga hesitated. His accent was that of a Frenchman. She did not know the man.

"My husband is not at home," she said.

"I know that. For that reason I am here now. I have something important to say to you about your grandfather."

As he spoke he so changed his position by advancing one foot that the door could not be closed.

Olga admitted him, and led the way into the living room. There, with the table between them, they stood, he still hat in hand.

"I speak Russian much better than the English," he said. "If it is not unpleasing to madame, we will converse in our own tongue."

Olga assented, with an inclination of the head ; and their conversation proceeded in Russian.

"Some time ago Mr. Lesley Dunbar sent a check for a large sum of money—fifteen thousand pounds, I believe—to your grandfather !"

"Yes."

"That check and your grandfather have fallen into the hands of two unscrupulous persons named Parker. You know them, I believe !"

"Yes, I know them."

"The check is crossed, and made payable to order ; therefore, the Parkers cannot turn it into money without his signature, which he obstinately refuses to give. It is a trial of patience on one side and endurance on the other, for the Parkers have gone to the length of using torture to compel their prisoner to endorse the check. His will is proof against every pain they dare inflict. They are now slowly killing him by starvation. When he is dead they can forge his signature, and find means to pass the check through a bank with impunity. It is in your power, madame, to save your grandfather's life."

"It is in his own power. He has but to give his signature, I suppose."

"You are quite right. The Parkers are cowardly in their villainy. They would make your grandfather free and get out of the country to-morrow if he would give in. But he will not. Doubtless you understand your grandfather's character."

"Well enough. If he is to be saved, how can I save him ?"

"I am coming to that. You must be aware, madam, that the Russian Government is severely displeased with you. Your articles in *The Month*, and the hostility to Russian rule—and especially police administration—which you have provoked in England, necessitate vigorous action on the part of the authorities. You are summoned to return to Russia."

His manner was a little less urbane, his voice a little more authoritative, as he made this announcement. Olga perceived the change, and understood its meaning.

"Further," he pursued, "police agents have been sent to enforce the summons."

"We are in England ; not in Russia," said Olga, calmly.

"Your experience should make you understand that

when an order is issued in St. Petersburg it is carried out, irrespective of conditions. The order in this case is to bring you and your grandfather into Russian territory within eight days, or put a stop to your writing. With regard to Ivan Isaakoff the process is simple enough. By simple intimidation he could be got out of the Parkers' hands, and placed on board a steamer, now lying in the Thames, ready to sail at any moment to Riga. That, however, is not necessary. He is doing more harm to other countries than to Russia, and left where he is he will assuredly be slowly murdered by the Parkers for the money to be realized when he is dead. You follow?"

"Yes."

"With regard to you the process would be different. The daughter-in-law of an English statesman, as you will tell me, is not to be kidnapped. It is doubtful if she could be detained against her will in Russia if she were taken there. You must go voluntarily, or your ability to injure the Russian Government must be stopped."

"How could you prevent my writing, or doing anything else I have a mind to?"

"If I were an executioner, Mrs. Dunbar," said the gray-bearded visitor, slowly, "I could do it in two minutes. What is to prevent your being shot dead or strangled at this moment?"

"And what is to prevent your being caught in the act?" asked Olga calmly.

He looked in Olga's face with his hard blue eyes in grim silence for a minute; then changing his attitude and mood together, he said, with returning suavity—

"Two agents in the street, and another now on the landing outside, who would give me timely warning of danger. Do not underrate your danger or our precaution, madam. For three days we have been waiting for an opportunity to see you alone. We know all the members of your family: all the arrangements of this house. This is the first occasion we have found to see you absolutely alone.

"Let us regard the affair in its more pleasing aspect, madam. We will suppose that you submit to the order of the police. Instead of leaving your grandfather to be murdered by the Parkers—as we certainly shall if you refuse to submit—we shall take him out of confinement, and restore him to you. If you object to a sea voyage,

you will be conveyed, with first-class accommodation by rail, to St. Petersburg, and every consideration will be paid to your wishes. We will undertake to purchase the check from the Parkers—to whom it will be of no possible value when Ivan Isaakoff is out of their power. This will give you a competence on which you may live wherever you like, and in perfect freedom, within the confines of Russia."

Olga knew the value of Russian promise too well to be deceived by this last promise. She saw with perfect conviction that once more in Russia she would be deported to some remote province in Siberia, when all traces of her would be lost. But the offer of the check was less illusory.

"If I consent to return with you to St. Petersburg, will you give me that check, and allow me to dispose of it in any manner I choose before leaving London?" she asked.

"Yes. I will agree to that on the understanding that you are to make no resistance—no attempt to communicate with any one but your grandfather by word or letter before the last moment of departure."

Olga reflected in silence. What did it matter to her whether she ended her days in London or in Siberia? The only difference was to her advantage. She would not have to accept money from Lesley's father, and she would cease at once to be a burden on them.

"I accept," she said.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

LEX TALIONIS.

A NEAT brougham was waiting in Victoria Street at a little distance from Grandison Chambers. Olga stepped into it, and the agent, with another, permitted themselves to take the seat opposite to her, while a third, with the portmanteau which Olga, under the agents' observation, had hastily packed with the articles necessary for her voyage, took the box seat beside the driver. As the carriage rattled away eastward, Olga leaned back in the corner,

closing her eyes ; but the agent and his companion kept up a brisk discussion the whole way. They spoke in a low tone, but in English, for the companion was Hemmings, the ex-detective, who had at last found a client who paid for his information respecting the Parkers and Zassoulitch, and offered still more for help of a less warrantable kind.

When the rattling ceased and the brougham stopped, Olga, opening her eyes, found that they were in a narrow street of quiet, decent houses. It seemed deserted, and after the noise and hubbub of traffic through which they had passed the silence was striking. A man in the dress of a costermonger lounged past the brougham.

"All right ; they're both in," he muttered, as he passed, with a side glance at Hemmings.

"I must trouble you to get out here, madam," said the agent. "You go on first, Hemmings, with your man and do your business."

Hemmings stepped out, and at a sign his confederate on the box joined him. The agent held the door while Olga alighted, and together they walked to the corner of the street.

"One moment," said the agent, peering down the narrow turning they had come to. Looking up Olga read a well-remembered name on the corner house—"Beatrice Terrace." Glancing down the blind turning she saw the two men who had gone in advance standing on the step of a house a little way down. At the same moment she heard an echoing single knock as Hemmings let the knocker fall. They waited a couple of moments and then the agent said—

"Come on if you please, madam," as Hemmings thrust his foot in the opening door, and his companion pushed forward.

When they reached the house, Olga found Mrs. Parker fainting on the stairs at the end of the narrow passage, while Hemmings was securing the handcuffs upon her wrists.

"Shut the door, if you please, sir," said he to the agent, who at once complied.

The sudden outburst of mingled sounds in a room below showed that Hemming's companion was at work with Parker.

"Do you want any help ?" Hemmings called out.

"No ; all right. I've got him safe. It's all right with this joker," came the broken response from below.

"What's this for ?" gasped Mrs. Parker.

"What's it for, Mrs. Parker ? Why, from information received, we've come to arrest you for the illegal detention of this lady's father, and for other offenses which you will have to answer for when we think proper to bring you up before the magistrate. Come along, missus, you shall go down to James in the kitchen. Don't want to part husband and wife before we're obliged. Now, then, up with you ; it's no good shamming a fit with me."

"This is your doing, is it, you Russian thief ?" hissed Mrs. Parker, turning upon Olga as Hemmings pushed her along to the kitchen stairs ; and she followed this up with screaming invectives which only ceased when she reached the kitchen and turned the vials of her wrath out upon Parker, who, with his hands in the iron bracelets, sat sullenly on a chair, wiping with his cuff the blood which flowed freely from his nose.

"Bliged to give him one on his beak," exclaimed his captor.

"Do you call yourself a man ?" screamed Mrs. Parker at her husband, "to sneak off and leave like that, and then be run down like this——"

"Stop that woman's voice. We must not have a noise here," said the agent.

In a twinkling Hemmings caught up a dish cloth, whipped it round the lower part of Mrs. Parker's long face, and gagged her securely.

"Serve the man in the same way," said the agent ; "lay them down on the floor and tie them securely foot to foot."

Mrs. Parker resisted. It was no good. A well-timed movement of Hemming's foot tripped her up and brought her down with a bang on the floor. Parker, without waiting for this persuasion, dropped down and submitted quietly to be gagged and have his feet bound to those of his plunging and less docile helpmate.

Having assured himself that the hand-cuffs, the gags, and the knotted clothes line were secure, the agent said—

"Now, if you please, we will go upstairs and see Mr. Isaakoff. You know the room, Hemmings,"

Hemmings led the way up the narrow stairs. As they reached the top of the second flight they heard a faint cry for help from the room facing them. The key was in the

door ; the agent turned it and entered. Olga following found her grandfather lying on his back upon a narrow bed, his wrists fastened on each side to the frame of the iron bedstead. He was emaciated to the last degree. His sightless eyes protruded from the sunk sockets ; the bones of his nose and cheeks stood out prominently through the yellow skin. His face puckered up with an expression of ferocious joy when the agent, speaking in Russian, said, "Isaakoff, your granddaughter has come to save you."

"I knew it—I knew it?" he cried. "I knew I should beat them—those clumsy villains. Where are they—the Parkers? Not escaped?"

"No ; they are below, as helpless as you."

"Don't tell me any more yet," cried the old man, writhing on the bed with delight. "No more yet. I am too weak to stand the joy of this triumph all at once after waiting and suffering so long. Give me food. Bread—nothing but bread and water."

"Fetch him something, poor old wretch?" said Hemmings, to his assistant, with a touch of sympathy in his voice.

"You who spoke," said the old man ; "you've got a heart in you ; take off the quilt that gives me fever ; pour cold water on my feet. Look at them."

Hemmings stripped off the coverlet. Isaakoff wore the clothes in which he had come to the house. They were disordered, creased and twisted about his body and limbs. Only his boots and socks had been removed, for what purpose was evident by the horrible condition of his feet.

"Why, what on earth have they been doing to you?" asked Hemmings, regarding them in wonder.

"Pour water, cold water on them for mercy's sake," cried the old man, imploringly.

Olga made a step towards the ewer that stood by the dirty washstand, but sickened by the loathsome odor of the room and the yet more loathsome spectacle presented by her grandfather's charred and festering feet, her strength failed her. She reeled and would have fallen, but for the prompt support of the agent. With the help of Hemmings he took her into the adjoining room.

"Go to my grandfather," she said, as soon as she was restored to consciousness.

"On your word of honor not to leave this room till we

return, and to make no communication with any one through the window. You can do no good. I will act for you, and return when we have arranged matters. Do you promise?"

Olga gave the required promise, and the two men, leaving her, returned as the third came up from below with a pitcher of water and a loaf.

"Set that window open, Bennett," said Hemmings, taking the pitcher. "We shall all be poisoned. There's fever in the place."

They unbound Isaakoff, and setting him on the side of the bed, plunged his feet in a basin of water. The old man, rocking himself to and fro, cried with delight in this relief from torment. Then he tore open his shirt and leaned forward to feel the cool air blowing through the opened window, drawing deep and long breaths in silence.

"Here's your grub, father, when you're done gaping like a fish out o'water," said Bennett.

Isaakoff seized the loaf, and tearing off a piece, ate it ravenously, chuckling hoarsely from time to time, and nodding his head in satisfaction.

"They have tried everything their muddy brutal wits suggested," he said, after his eager craving had been abated. "They've thrust pins into my nails; they've burnt my feet; they've starved me, but they couldn't conquer me."

"Why didn't you sing out?" asked Bennett.

Isaakoff smiled at his simplicity.

"It's bad enough to lie day after day with your hands bound. You would go mad if you were gagged as well, my friend. I could give you another reason," he added, with a cunning wrinkle in the corners of his eyes; "but that's good enough. Drink."

He took a deep draught from the pitcher, and then continued—

"Did some one say my grandchild was here?"

"Yes; I told you that she has come to save you."

"You speak Russian," said Isaakoff, with quick suspicion. "Come to save me! What does that mean? Am I not saved? The Parkers, you told me, were prisoners. An Englishman spoke to me just now. I cannot be put to torture: left to be murdered. I *am* saved."

"No, you are not," replied the Russian. "I am an

agent of the Russian police. The Englishmen are employed by me to commit an illegal act. They have no right to interfere between the Parkers and you. At a word from me they would leave you here to the mercy of the Parkers to avoid the consequences of breaking into this house and assaulting the Parkers. I shall give them that word, and you will be abandoned to your fate unless you accept my terms."

"Ah! I begin to comprehend. What are your terms?"

"First of all, you will agree to go quietly with us on board a ship, which will take you to Riga."

"H'm! Well, it's not harder to die on the great road to Siberia than here. And, at least, I shall get food to eat. You may consider that condition accepted. What next?"

"In the second place, you must give up the check sent you by Mr. Dunbar."

"I haven't got it; you ought to know that. Fools as they are, the Parkers are not so idiotic as to let me have it in my hands, even for a moment. If I had but the chance I should have destroyed it long ago, knowing that Dunbar would make the payment all the same, and knowing equally well that the Parkers would then no longer have any inducement to waste time on me."

"Do you know where it is?"

The old man nodded, but made no other response for some minutes. He sat with his chin in his hand, and his brow creased in sinister thoughts. When he again spoke he waved his hand impatiently as a demand for further reflection. At last he spoke in low, murmured tones—

"It's in the house here—that check. Every day they have offered to give me freedom, if I would write my name on it. I know how to get it. You shall have it if you will let me get it in my own way. I accept your terms, but you must let me have a trifle in for that fifteen thousand pounds."

"What do you demand?"

"*Lex talionis.*"

"What is that?"

"I will show you. Take me down to the Parkers. I can get down there with help, though my feet crumble under me."

He put his feet on the ground, and springing up with the agility of a hale man, cried—

"What is it? 'An eye for an eye—a tooth for a tooth'!"

CHAPTER XLIX.

REVENGE.

THEY led old Isaakoff down to the kitchen where the Parkers lay foot to foot as they had been left. At the sight of their victim's face animated with vindictive malice Parker and then his wife made a furious effort to break the bonds that held them—like trapped foxes at the coming of a hound.

It was getting dark. A lamp was found and lit.

"They are here," said the agent, leading Isaakoff forward.

"I heard them," he replied, with a sardonic grin, as he bent forward, rubbing his hands.

The agent dismissed Hemmings and his assistant with instructions to stay outside Olga's door, and prevent her from leaving the room, foreseeing that an operation would have to be performed upon the Parkers which even these hirelings might object to. As they ascended the stairs he told Isaakoff in Russian, that they were now alone and he was to despatch his business quickly.

The old man dropped on his knees and crawled stealthily to the side of the Parkers, who, turning their faces towards him, regarded his approach in quaking terror.

"This is my attentive hostess, Mrs. Parker," he said, passing his hands swiftly over her head and face. "There is sweat upon your face, madam, as if you were in mortal fear of something. This gag is unpleasant when you wish to shriek, isn't it? But there are times when gags are necessary, aren't there?" As he spoke he passed his hands down her arms, and felt the handcuffs on her wrists. "Not pleasant, either, to have your hands fastened like this, is it? Almost as bad as having them tied to a bedstead. What is this?" he asked, as he reached her feet. "Your ankles tied to those of some one else? Now who can that be? A gentleman, with his hands fastened in the

same uncomfortable manner ; and gagged also," he continued, shuffling along on his knees, as he explored with his hands ; " these features should belong to James Parker. You, too, have cold sweat on your face, as if you had done wrong and expected punishment. You have a timorous nature, Parker, and certain gifts which fitted you admirably for servitude, but for nothing else. If you had kept single you might have lived to honorable old age. But you married a silly woman with a violent temper, and, becoming her slave, are likely to come to the gallows with her before long. Mark those words, Parker ; they come from the lips of an old man who has never given you a false prophecy. Do not tremble, my man ; I bear you very little ill will. You are rather a fool than a calculating villain. I look upon you as an instrument in the hands of your wife : I shall take that into consideration. I will not forget, also, that I am under some obligation to you. Besides being a good servant to me formerly, you have kept me here at a great deal of expense and trouble. You have furnished me, unknown, I believe, to Mrs. Parker, with scraps of food from time to time, without which I might have died, or gone mad. Also one day you stopped your amiable partner from running more pins under my nails. Indeed, I believe that but for you she would have killed me right out a week ago. Whether you prevented her from committing murder from your naturally timid fear of the consequences, or whether from humanity, I cannot be quite sure. I almost think it was fear that actuated you, but as I am *not* quite sure you shall have the benefit of the doubt.

" Well, now, Parker," he continued, after a pause, " I am going away ; but I cannot leave without a certain article of property, which you or Mrs. Parker have in your possession. I allude to the check which you were good enough to fetch from the Prince's Hotel for me. I told you, if you remember, that nothing which you or Mrs. Parker could do would induce me to sign it ; I told you also that I should not leave this house without it ; and I prophesied also that sooner or later I should get it. You see how my past prophecies have been fulfilled ; now I am going to show to you how the latter prophecy is to be made true. I am about to take off your gag that you may answer me freely ; but I warn you that if you use your voice for any other purpose the gag will be replaced, and

you will suffer more pain than ever your wife inflicted upon me. Bear that in mind, Parker. Have you understood all that I have said to you?" he asked, as he removed the cloth from Parker's mouth.

Parker gasped for breath a moment or two and then answered, "Yes," faintly.

"Now, Parker, will you tell me if the check I spoke of is on your person?"

Parker answered in the negative readily enough.

"I hardly supposed it was. Can you tell me where I shall find it?"

Parker hesitated. By a vigorous wrench at his foot Mrs. Parker warned him not to betray the secret.

"No," he said, again faintly.

"Don't be afraid, Parker; I am not going to hurt you. You tell me you do not know where it is?"

"No; I don't know where it is."

"Does your wife know where it is?"

At another warning tug of Mrs. Parker's foot her husband answered again, "No."

"This is incredible, Parker. I'm afraid there is a lapse of memory on your part. I shall go through the formality of seeing if it is in your dress, and if I don't find it there, I shall try to awaken your recollection. You need not tremble, I shall not hurt you, Parker, unless I am driven to the last extremity."

Rapidly the quick-fingered old man emptied Parker's pockets, and finding nothing there which might contain the desired paper proceeded to examine his clothing. Coming to his throat, Isaakoff, with a sudden movement, clutched collar, necktie, and shirt band with the fingers of his right hand, and pressing his left on Parker's mouth, gave a wrench; stud, button, and tie gave way, leaving the man's throat bare.

The agent standing by with folded arms looked down his eyebrows creased in perplexity at this unaccountable act of violence, while Isaakoff apologized to Parker for what he had done "in a moment of temporary forgetfulness."

Crawling to the side of Mrs. Parker with savage joy in his face, he began his examination by taking down her closely plaited hair and dishevelled the tresses. Holding a hairpin before her face, he said, with savage ferocity—

"Do you see this hairpin, my good woman? I shall

put it in my pocket in case you oblige me to use it presently. You know how useful they are sometimes."

He felt her dress sleeve, and coming to a loose fold he gave it a tear; and getting another grip of the part, tore it down to her wrist, leaving her arm bare with three long wounds in it where his long nails had scored the flesh.

The agent looked still more perplexed.

"Obviously we must look for the check elsewhere," said Isaakoff, turning towards Parker. "You cannot remember yet awhile where it was put?"

"No," answered Parker, feebly.

"So be it."

The old man changed his position again, and kneeling on the woman's shins wrenched off the slippers from her feet.

"Give me some matches," he said in Russian, holding out his hand.

The agent felt in his pocket, found a box of cigar lights, put them in Isaakoff's hand, and folding his arms again looked down with expectant interest.

"Parker," said Isaakoff, as he took out a match, "I am going to burn the soles of your wife's feet—not yours. She is about to feel what she made me suffer. When you think she has had enough you can tell us where to look for the check. Mind what I told you about making use of your voice, or you may be gagged and burnt."

He struck the match; it was one of those vestas with a long flaming Vesuvian head.

In anticipation of the torture, Mrs. Parker writhed and twisted in agony, beating the floor on each side with her manacled hands. The agent, watching his opportunity advanced one foot, and setting it on her arm, pinned her to the ground.

Meanwhile Isaakoff, bending down, applied the flaming vesta to the sole of Mrs. Parker's foot. A light flame ran over the surface as the loose threads took fire. When he removed the vesta, there was a black patch on the white stocking, surrounded with a thin red line of smouldering cotton. There was no sound but a muffled gurgle through the cloth that held the woman's jaws asunder, and the stertorous breathing through her nostrils.

Isaakoff lightly touched the smouldering cotton, and with a diabolical grin struck another match. The agent looked down in Mrs. Parker's purple face with a grim smile as she threw her head from side to side.

Isaakoff put the second vesta to the other foot and kept it there for a minute. Then he waited in silence, now and then assuring himself by a touch that the smouldering ring was spreading.

Mrs. Parker's continuous efforts to break away increased in violence. She threw her head more desperately from side to side. Her face grew black. The agent looked on like a surgeon at an operation. Presently a thread of blood trickled down from the woman's nostril, and her head ceased to move to and fro.

"Enough," said the agent, calmly. "She has fainted."

"What do you say, Parker? Shall we try a hairpin? Mrs. Parker revived me that way."

Parker made no response.

The agent bent down and untied the cloth that gagged Mrs. Parker.

"I am afraid you will drive us to extremities, Parker," said Isaakoff, as he rubbed out the smouldering embers on Mrs. Parker's feet with her slipper. "Your wife can feel no more—you must, my man, unless you recover your memory."

Parker's breathing became short and quick; but he still held his tongue.

Isaakoff shifted his position, and laid a hand on Parker's foot. At that touch the man's courage gave way.

"Mercy, mercy, Mr. Zassoulitch, sir! mercy!" he exclaimed.

"Not so loud, Parker; not so loud," said Isaakoff, shuffling towards him, and feeling about for the gag. "We shall have to tie up your mouth."

"Oh, don't, sir—don't. Remember I did my best for you."

"Yes, but you must do better than that now. You must give up that check. Come, tax your memory a little, or these lights will have to be used."

"I'll tell you, sir. In the corner cupboard—a tea canister—at the bottom of that."

"The cupboard is locked," said the agent. "Where is the key?"

"It was in my pocket."

The contents of Parker's emptied pockets lay in a heap beside him. Isaakoff's hand was upon it; he handed up the key and waited. There was a long clasp knife among the remaining articles; as he heard the key turn in the

lock, Isaakoff whipped out the knife, flashed the blade for an instant before Parker's eyes, and slipped it up his sleeve. At sight of the open blade, Parker expecting nothing less than immediate slaughter, shut his eyes with a howl.

"Stop that," said the agent.

Isaakoff wedged the cloth in Parker's mouth, and tied it securely behind his neck then finding by Mrs. Parker's movement that she had recovered consciousness, he served her in the same way.

Meanwhile the agent carefully tipping the tea out of the canister, had found the check closely folded up and tied round with a piece of thread.

"Now, Isaakoff, if you are ready we will go," he said.

"You have found the check?"

"That is immaterial to you. *You* will not get it."

"I know Russian officials too well to expect that. I asked if you had found it."

"Yes; come on."

Isaakoff accepted the agent's guidance, and leaning on his arm hobbled painfully up to the entrance passage.

"You will stop here while I go up and fetch your granddaughter."

"No; take me up to the room where you found me, and leave me there."

"Nonsense. Your granddaughter has consented to go back to Russia, to save you from the Parkers."

"More fool she. You may have cheated her with promises; you won't me. Does she think I wish to die on the road to Siberia?"

"Do you think it wise to compel me to take you on board the vessel by force?"

"Wiser than for you to employ force. Remember we are not yet in Russia. You may bind me to prevent my committing violence upon you; you may gag me to prevent my crying for help; but you cannot force me to breathe if I choose to hold my breath. You may see by the torture I have endured that I am not wanting in resolution; and I tell you that nothing on earth shall make me go back to Russia. Beware! It may get you into serious difficulties to be found with a dead man in your carriage when you reach the landing stage."

The agent regarded the old man in uneasy silence for a minute as he drew his short beard reflectively through

his hand. Isaakoff's indomitable will and mental vigor were made more obvious by contrast with his physical decrepitude and age. The agent, with something of the superstitious awe felt by Parker in former times, recognized that the old man was dangerous and not to be trifled with.

"If I leave you here, what have you to hope from the mercy of the Parkers?"

"Mercy! I shall show them less than they have shown me. Leave us together. I have not had my revenge yet."

"Oh, it's that! You intend to butcher them when we are gone."

"That would be mercy. Their sufferings would be over in a few minutes. There's worse than that in store for them."

"What do you propose?"

"Take me up to the room where you found me. I shall make no noise. Tell my grandchild that I have gone on in advance, under the escort of your *employés*, to avoid observation. If she has a mind to return to Siberia she will not look too closely into details."

"What course do you intend to take yourself—that's what I want to know?"

Isaakoff bent forward and whispered a few words. The agent started back, incredulous.

"Your courage will fail," he said. "You will change your mind before the morning."

"If I do you shall take me where you like—St. Petersburg, Kara, the devil—anywhere. Let your men ask me to-morrow morning which I prefer to do: go with them or stay here. If I hold to staying here, let them unbind the Parkers and tell them I am at their mercy."

"Well, you shall have your own way," said the agent, with a short laugh. "Come upstairs."

CHAPTER L.

THE END OF ISAAKOFF.

OLGA was sitting where he had left her when the agent re-entered the small dingy room with a lamp in his hand.

"Isaakoff has gone on with the men," he said, putting down the lamp. "Here is the check. It only remains now for you to complete the agreement."

Olga took the check and looked at her husband's signature—the last memento of one now lost to her forever—until tears blurred her vision; then taking out her note-book she wrote a few words and tore out the leaf.

"You will let me send this to my husband," she said. "I must see what you have written before I consent to that," he replied.

She handed him the written page and he read it.

"MY BELOVED HUSBAND.—I give you back your fortune. I would do more than this, and give you your freedom too if I loved you less dearly. Time alone can restore all I have robbed you of, my dear one; but I pray that release may come quickly.

"OLGA."

The agent nodded as he returned the note, and stood regarding her in silent admiration, as she folded the note and enclosed it with the check in the addressed envelope she had brought with her for that purpose.

"Queer lot, father and daughter," he said to himself.

They left the house together and walked on till they came to a pillar box. Olga dropped the letter in and heard it fall with such feelings as one has in dropping the last flower in a grave.

The agent opened the door of the fly which had followed them and drawn up by the curb, and stepped in after Olga had taken her seat. They drove to Tower stairs; then took

a wherry, and in a few minutes pulled alongside the black hull of a steamer. On the deck Olga was received by the captain with courteous deference, and conducted by him to her cabin. The clank of furnace doors and the movement on deck showed that preparations for departure were already being made; but it was not until six the next morning that the steamer winches began to raise anchor. Hemmings had come on board to report that Isaakoff at the last moment had stuck to his determination to stay in the house and face the Parkers. Then, after shaking hands with the agent, the ex-detective descended the steps, the wherry pushed off from the steamer, the bell sounded in the engine room, and the *Ivanovich* of Riga left its moorings.

As Hemmings in accordance with the instructions he received removed the handcuffs from the Parkers' wrists he told them that they would find their old friend upstairs; then he quickly withdrew, leaving them to complete the work of liberation themselves.

Stiff and sore with lying so long in constraint upon the hard boards, exhausted by the moral and physical torture to which they had been subjected they were powerless to move for some time—to do more than unbind the cloths that gagged them. Mrs. Parker was the first to wriggle herself into a sitting posture and attack the cord that bound her burnt and swollen feet to those of her husband.

"If he is up there he shall pay for this," she muttered, in a voice that quivered with pain and passion.

"Better leave him alone," groaned Parker, resting on his elbow after a futile endeavor to sit up. "We've had nothing but misfortune since we first meddled with him. I don't believe he's human."

"We shall see about that when I get at him again."

She tore furiously at the tightly knotted cord.

"You helpless log!" she screamed through her clenched teeth; "what are you sitting there for? Do you expect me to do everything? You men are fit for nothing."

"Oh, a good job too," growled Parker, whose temper also was not improved by suffering. "If you had done nothing we should be better off than we are. The check's gone, and you've got your feet roasted—that's the result of your messing about. Serve you right. It's all your own doing."

"Wait till I've got this cursed knot out—wait till I've taken my revenge on that old Jew upstairs! Your turn will come then. You'll be meek enough, I warrant, when that account comes to be settled. Ah!"

She had succeeded at last in loosening the first knot; after that the others came undone more readily, and finally their feet were free. The first use Parker made of his liberty was to reinvigorate himself with a dram from a bottle in the cupboard; but revenge was a sufficient stimulant for the woman, and every fresh pang as she hobbled painfully to the stairs added to the fury of her vindictive spirit; at every step she invented some new torture to inflict upon Isaakoff.

She found it easier to crawl up the stairs on her hands and feet than to walk. It was dark and she knew her way. She was too mad with this craving for vengeance, to wait for Parker, or even to bestow an angry thought on him, but halfway up the first flight her dress caught on a nail and then she screamed to him to bring a light.

When he came with the lamp in his hand and threw the light upon her, he was terrified by her appearance. Bent in the attitude of a beast, her tangled, tow-colored hair hanging about her face, her teeth and eyes gleaming out from the darkness, she looked unearthly, diabolical. Then, thinking of old Isaakoff, he asked himself what would happen when these two fiends met free to wreak their devilish spite upon each other.

"Come down, Jinny—give over. Don't be a fool," he said, persuasively.

"If I had that lamp in my hand, I'd fling it down and brain you with it, you sneaking, mean-spirited hound!" she cried.

Tearing her dress from the nail, she continued her ascent, screaming as she went, "Give over! A likely thing! How long have I mastered my feelings in the hope of getting something by it! Now everything's lost, I'll just let 'em go as I please. I'll have my revenge; that'll be worth something. Bring that light."

Parker followed slowly with the light. As the woman shuffled along the passage to the upper flight of stairs, a sound from above brought them both to a stand.

"Do you hear that?" cried Mrs. Parker. "Doesn't that stir up your rage? He's breaking that new 'soot' of bedroom furniture."

It sounded like it indeed, that crashing and splitting of light woodwork.

Mrs. Parker made an effort to rush up-stairs. She fell at the third step.

"Go up and stop him, you wretch!" she shrieked at her husband. "You are not crippled—go!"

But Parker made no attempt to move from the passage below, where he stood quaking with fear; and just then a new sound came to paralyze him. A window was broken, the glass shattering down on the pavement outside, and Isaakoff's voice was heard crying, frantically—

"Police! Help! Murder—murder!"

"They're killing the old man!" Parker gasped.

"You fool! it's nothing of the kind. He's screaming out to wake the neighbors and get us into trouble," Mrs. Parker answered, struggling to reach the landing.

The noise continued. A water jug crashed through the window sash and fell upon the pavement with a smash that echoed through the quiet street. The old man yelled and shrieked as if he were struggling for dear life. The washstand was overthrown; the frail wood splintered and flew.

Mrs. Parker, reaching the landing, threw herself against the door; it resisted her efforts; and her shrill scream was added to the discord.

Parker in the passage distinguished other sounds which, giving a new turn to his fears, roused him from his stupor. Running up the stairs he called in a hoarse undertone to his wife—

"There's people outside; they're trying the door!"

Mrs. Parker attacked the door with redoubled energy: heedless of her husband—mad with fury.

There was silence within the room for a moment, followed by a fresh outburst.

Again there was a crash of glass, and the sound of Isaakoff's voice calling out into the street—

"Help!—help! Murder—murder!"

And now the bell below began to ring; the knocker was banged heavily at intervals; voices were raised in the street, calling, "Police!" and echoing the old man's cry for help.

The door at length yielded to Mrs. Parker's efforts.

"I'll soon stop you, you old villain!" she cried, as she wedged her flat body in the narrow opening. As she

stood there struggling to get through, Parker saw Isaakoff's long, vulture-like hand fall lightly on her head, and then twine itself in the tangled meshes of her disordered hair. With a howl of rage and pain, Mrs. Parker disappeared, dragged into the room by the hair of her head.

Parker was once more paralyzed with terror, as he listened now to the struggling and screaming of Isaakoff and his wife within, now to the banging and ringing at the door below.

Suddenly, with one last scream, there was a fall within, and all was still. Even the row at the door ceased, as if the crowd gathered there had realized that all was over.

The first sound Parker next heard was his wife's voice, gasping low in dread and horror.

"Parker, Parker—a light, for God's sake! Something's happened: I don't know what."

He set down the lamp; opened the door an inch or two wider by a vigorous thrust of his shoulder, picked up the light, and wedged himself through.

"Bring it here, quick—the light!" faltered Mrs. Parker. "I can't get away. His weight's on my chest, and he's got me by the hair. What is it? I'm all wet."

Parker held forward the lamp. They were both stretched on the floor—Mrs. Parker and Isaakoff—his chest lying across hers, the fingers of his right hand close clenched in her hair. He drew a step nearer and choked with terror. His wife's face and neck were covered with blood, and there was a pool on the carpet beside her.

"Has he done for you, Jinny?" he gasped.

"No, no. Take him off; for God's sake, take him off."

Parker set the lamp on the floor, and seizing the inert body of Isaakoff, dragged him over. Then as the old man's head rolled heavily back he perceived the truth: Isaakoff had cut his own throat.

At that moment a pane of glass in the window below was broken, and there was a hum of voices outside.

The police were getting into the house.

CHAPTER LI.

THE RIGHT HON. VANQUISHED AT LAST.

ON his return from Grandison Chambers, the Right Hon. found his son pacing the pavement in front of the house. To sit indoors and wait patiently for a decision affecting his whole future was impossible to one in such a state of nervous irritability.

"Well, sir?" Lesley asked, eagerly, as the Right Hon. stepped out of the cab.

"She consents," said his father.

Lesley thunderstruck stood silent as the Right Hon. paid the cabman; then he said, in a tone of incredulity—

"She consents?"

"'I will release your son;' those were her last words."

"I must hear them from her own lips," Lesley said, fiercely.

"You shall. I foresaw that it would be necessary, and arranged with your wife accordingly. She has an engagement this afternoon, but at six o'clock we are to meet at your rooms. Now let us go into lunch; it is past my usual hour."

"She consents," Lesley said again when they were in the house, and alone—he and his father—adding in a tone of incredulity, "She, Olga, barter love for money!"

"Do not misunderstand. Your wife had the good taste and good sense to avoid the question of money. In making a mercenary bargain she would have lost all claim to generous consideration. She was satisfied with my assurance that she would have a suitable provision. You take an exaggerated view of things, as most people do whose reasoning faculty is affected by overstrained emotion. Your wife is neither an angel nor a devil, but an extremely clever and practical young woman. Under favorable conditions she might have left a name in history; the conditions, unfortunately for her, were adverse, and she has

fallen the martyr of circumstances. She has done her best to re-establish a position for herself and you, and failed. She sees that it is hopeless to expect anything but poverty and hardship by continuing to live with you, and she relinquishes the project—very wisely—to accept a more profitable alternative. She, like most people of that class, is to be pitied, but considering what her position and outlook were a year ago, I cannot think that she has any real reason to be dissatisfied with her present prospects."

"If she is satisfied with that," said Lesley, with passion, "then she is a liar and a hypocrite."

"To a certain degree we are all hypocrites. We set before us a standard of excellence, and to attain it assume an attitude in harmony with our ideal. To be admired and respected, your wife affects the virtues which command that regard. But how much real feelings she possesses your own observation of her behavior in the present crisis should show you. At the present moment she is singing at a concert——"

"Ah, if you had heard her sing as I heard her last night!" exclaimed Lesley, interrupting his father, "If you had heard her, kneeling at my feet, imploring love and forgiveness, you could not accuse her of hypocrisy or indifference. You do not know her."

"Well——," The Right Hon. rose, declining to continue the argument, but his shrug said as plainly as words—"Time will show. We shall see this evening who is right—you or I."

At six o'clock, when they reached the flat in Grandison Chambers, they found Mrs. Gough and her niece standing at the door.

"We can't make mistress hear, sir," said the old woman. "And we've been ringing nigh ten minutes."

"Mrs. Dunbar has not yet returned from the concert," the Right Hon. observed, calmly; intending the explanation for Lesley, who seemed unnecessarily agitated.

"Mistress did not go out, sir," returned Mrs. Gough. "She sent us with a letter and said she was not going to sing again."

"My God!" faltered Lesley, "is this the release she promised?"

The Right Hon. took the key from his son's trembling fingers and opened the door; but it was not without aq-

prehensive awe that he entered the room. The possibility of suicide crossed his mind also. Had he mistaken the woman altogether? Was it heroism and not self-interest which actuated her? Was she capable of releasing Lesley by self-destruction? These questions were in his mind as he struck a light, looked around him, and passed from room to room in sick trepidation. He drew a deep breath of relief when he found his fear unrealized. He had even a smile of satisfaction on his face as he returned to Lesley and said—

"There is no cause for alarm. Your wife has gone for a little exercise; it is rather before the appointed time than after."

But Lesley shook his head in fear too deep for expression. Crossing the room his foot had struck the phial that slipped from Olga's hand. And though the contents showed that none had been taken, it proved clearly to his mind the tendency of her thoughts.

"She knew that it would kill me with remorse to find her here dead," he said, showing the bottle when his father asked for an explanation of his silence and terror. "It lay here"—he pointed to the floor.

"It may have come there by accident," suggested the Right Hon.

"Impossible. It was in that desk last night."

He himself was uncertain in which drawer he kept it, but in opening both the objects he saw set up a train of thought which led him to divine, as if by inspiration, the whole line of conclusions which had led Olga to meditate suicide. He pointed them out to his father, who heard him in silence, too wise a prophet to vaticinate against such odds, and then said, in a firmer voice—

"We must find her, my poor Olga!"

They went down without a word to the hall; there the Right Hon.'s spirits were partially revived by the hall porter affirming that Mrs. Dunbar had gone out with a gentleman, followed by a person who might be a servant.

"If you are still uneasy, we will go to Scotland Yard," he said. "I may find some one I know there, and we shall get the best advice and help procurable."

Lesley replied by hailing a passing cab.

At Scotland Yard the Right Hon. readily obtained an interview with the superintendent of police, and reluct-

antly confessed that there was reason to fear his daughter-in-law had left home with an intention not to return.

A description of the missing lady was at once telegraphed to all the stations in the London district, with an order to forward any particulars relating to her that might come to hand.

From Scotland Yard they returned to Grandison Chambers, where they heard that nothing had been seen or heard of Mrs. Dunbar. It was now seven o'clock. Lesley abandoned the hope of seeing Olga again alive; and the Right Hon. dared not venture an explanation of her protracted absence in the face of his son's terrible and fixed conviction.

They waited in awful suspense hour after hour until the Right Hon. could endure it no more.

"I shall not leave you till we have some definite information respecting Olga," he said; "but I want rest. Which room shall I take?"

Lesley pointed to his own room and again looked at his watch.

A little after seven the next morning, Mrs. Gough, answering a ring at the bell, found a policeman at the door.

"I want to see Mr. Dunbar," said he, "Tell him, if you please, I'm from Scotland Yard."

Mrs. Gough tapped at the door of Lesley's room, believing him to be there. The Right Hon. received the message, ordered the messenger to wait, hastily dressed, and came out into the anteroom, where the police officer was seated.

"The superintendent has sent me up to say that they've got information respecting Mrs. Dunbar at the Whitechapel Road station."

"Is she alive?" asked the Right Hon, under his breath, fearing to be overheard by Lesley.

"Well, I can't say, sir. There's been an ugly affair down there. A murder or something, I don't know the rights of it."

"Thank you. Tell the superintendent that I will go to Whitechapel Road at once. And kindly send a cab to the door if you meet one."

The Right Hon., abstemious as he was, would have gladly drunk a glass of brandy at that moment. Never, had he felt so miserably sick from moral causes. In

silence and dread he softly opened the door of the other room, Olga's, and looked in.

Lesley lay where he had fallen in an agony of remorse and grief a few hours before, his body across the bed, his face resting on the pillow which his wife's head had last pressed. The Right Hon. went to the bedside and bent over his son with deep affliction in his heart. It was his boy—his one son—all that was left to him of that sweet union when a woman's love was all in all to him—this poor man, hollow-eyed, suffering even in sleep, with the stain of tears upon his drawn face.

"My poor boy—Les," he said, tenderly, as he touched his shoulder.

"Where is she—Olga, my Olga?" cried Lesley, starting to his feet.

"Come with me," said the Right Hon., taking his arm and pressing it to his side. "There is a vague report that we may hear of her at the East End."

He had reason to be glad of having put the fact in this guarded way when they learnt from the inspector at the Whitechapel station that it was a man who was dead and not a woman, as his fear had led him to suppose.

"It is about Mrs. Dunbar that we wish to know," he explained to the inspector.

"Yes, sir; I understand," said the inspector, respectfully, awed by the Right Hon.'s presence. "We've got some information about the lady, but it's mixed up with this affair. The only evidence is the word of two parties who contradict each other. But we may find out whether they're to be trusted if you will step into the yard."

"Certainly we will. What do you wish us to do there?"

"I wish you to identify, if you can, the party that's been murdered," said the inspector, leading the way.

In a shed at the side of the yard lay a body on a stretcher, covered with a blanket. The inspector drew down the cover, exposing the head of Isaakoff. There was no trace of violence in the face; it was placid and handsome, the white hair falling back from the finely developed front, the lips curved downwards, giving a cynical expression to the countenance.

"It is Mrs. Dunbar's grandfather," said the Right Hon.

"They said it was, sir, and as they told the truth in that point, we may believe them on the other," the

inspector said, drawing the blanket again over the dead man's head. "You can see the depositions in the office."

"It will save time, perhaps, if you tell us what has occurred."

The inspector, flattered, proceeded to narrate what had happened, as they slowly returned to the office, in the prescribed manner of an experienced man giving evidence from the witness box.

"I was going round with my men for the morning change a little before six, when I heard that there was something wrong at Beatrice Terrace. I hurried up and got there just in time to hear the last scream. I knew in a moment it was no ordinary fight like we have often enough, and instructed a constable to get in through the window sharp. He did so and let me in at the front door. Turning on the bull's eye—it wasn't light then you understand, sir—we ran upstairs. On the top flight we met the male tenant, James Parker——"

"James Parker. I know that name."

"Good, sir. We met him with a lamp in his hand. He tried to make out that him and his missis had been quarrelsome and nothing more. And his wife, Mrs. Parker, sang out from the room, 'Yes, that's right; it's all over now. It ain't no body's business but ours.' But I knew better than that. I saw that Parker was ready to drop with fear: he could hardly hold the lamp in his hand, besides which, I had heard that scream."

"'We'll see about that,' says I, giving the nod to my constable to look after the man. I got into the room with my lantern, and what did I see there? Why, that poor old man—one of 'em call's him Zassoulitch, or some such name."

"Yes; Zassoulitch is his name."

"Well, he was laying there, sir, on the floor with his throat cut, and the woman down alongside him. She couldn't get away. He'd got his hand in her hair, and it had stiffened in death."

The inspector paused to note the effect of this dramatic situation in his narrative, and continued—

"I saw at once it was a case of murder. Not a bit of doubt about it. There was the room all littered with things smashed in the struggle, and the woman smothered in blood, besides her hair being caught as I tell you: we

had to cut it away to separate them. I had the two, Mrs. Parker and her husband, brought down here sharp. I made out the charge sheet against the woman first, after giving her the usual warning. She stuck to it, that the old man was a lodger named Jacobs, who was a bit loose in his intellects, and stated that they were woke up by his smashing their furniture, and that in trying to stop him from doing mischief to himself, the furniture got smashed. She held out that he had killed himself, and would say no more. So I sent her into the cells, had in Parker, and struck him behind the bar. He told a very different story, being all of a jelly with fear, and I saw at once that he meant to make a clean breast of it, and round on his missis to save himself. And sure enough he did. It appears, from his deposition, that they inveigled the old man into the house, he being blind and alone, some time ago, and kept him there a prisoner, having got possession of a check, made payable to him for the nice little sum of fifteen thousand pounds. This check had to be endorsed and paid through a banker before they could make anything out of it. Of course there's a good many swell thieves who keep banking accounts; but none of 'em would give much for a piece of paper with a forged signature while the old man was alive. So the Parkers made up their minds to get a genuine signature if possible, by holding out promises or otherwise to the old gentleman, and then keeping him a prisoner till he died, when they could get off the check easily enough. And from the look of the poor old fellow's body he couldn't have held out much longer. Looks as if he had been systematically starved and ill-used shameful.

"Well, sir, yesterday, about dawn, Parker hearing a knock at the door, opened it; and in rushed a couple of men, who grabbed Mrs. Parker in the passage, and floored Parker when he bolted on catching sight of Mrs. Dunbar—the daughter of the old gentlemen—coming up the steps in company of another man. These parties handcuffed Parker and his wife, laid 'em both down on the kitchen floor, gagged 'em, and tied 'em together foot to foot by the ankles. Shortly afterwards they brought down Mr. Zassoulitch, and he, setting on Mrs. Parker, compelled Parker by threats to let out where the purloined *check* was concealed. Having got the check they went

away, leaving Parker and his wife bound on the floor and gagged so that they could scarcely breathe, let alone cry out. After a short time they heard the street door shut and made sure that the whole lot had gone and left them there to die of starvation or suffocation; but towards morning they heard the door open; a man struck a match, lit a lamp, and took away their handcuffs, telling 'em that Mr. Zassoulitch was upstairs, waiting for 'em. Then this man went away. Witness says his wife was like mad to be revenged on the old gentleman and wouldn't listen to his persuasions. When they were free he followed his missis upstairs, and there they heard Mr. Zassoulitch smashing things, as if he likewise had gone off——"

The Right Hon. checked the inspector's flow.

"Have you any further information about Mrs. Dunbar?"

"None at all, sir. Having the order from Scotland Yard, I, of course, made all inquiries. Parker only saw her for a moment outside the street door. She did not come down below when the check was being got out of the Parkers; and Parker believes that she went away with the rest yesterday afternoon. When Mrs. Parker is in the witness box and learns that her husband has split she may add something more, but I have no power to question her now."

The Right Hon. felt greatly relieved.

"One thing we may safely infer from this curious story," he said to Lesley when they left the station; "your wife, from some feeling of independence, or equity, has chosen to provide for herself rather than be under any further obligation to me. Obviously she has friends, and undoubtedly she will get this check cashed through them."

Lesley shook his head, making no other reply; but the Right Hon. nursed the pleasing conviction that, after all, he was right in his estimate of Olga's character, and that time would justify every step he had taken in the matter. It seemed to him scarcely worth while seeking further tidings of Olga, but he accompanied Lesley, whose distracted condition provoked increasing alarm.

Back again at Grandison Chambers, Lesley bounded up the stairs. When the Right Hon. following more deliberately, entered the room, he found his son standing with his face buried in his hands, sobbing as if his heart would

break. On the table lay an open letter and two slips of paper. The Right Hon. picked them up and found that one was the check, the other Olga's last words.

He dropped the papers ; and then, his stubborn spirit stricken down under this crushing blow, he laid his hand on Lesley's shoulder and said, in broken tones—

"I have wronged your wife, Lesley. Courage, my dear son ; it may not yet be too late to repair the injury I have done."

CHAPTER LII.

THE SUN RISES AGAIN.

WHOLESOME fear brought forth another confession. Before the Parkers were put on their trial for the murder of Ivan Isaakoff, Hemmings thought it best to come forward and tell all he knew about the mysterious affair. His evidence though it did not save the Parkers from conviction and punishment helped to clear up a great deal which was incomprehensible to the police. It enabled them, amongst other things to discover what had become of Mrs. Dunbar.

Unrelaxing in his endeavors to trace Olga, the Right Hon. was the first to learn from the police authorities that Olga had probably been taken back to Russia in the Riga steamer on which Hemmings had last seen the agent. He telegraphed instantly to Lesley—

"We shall probably find her in Russia. Prepare to leave England with me this afternoon. Find me at Gloucester Place."

Lesley's preparations were made in a very short time ; but it was late in the afternoon before the Right Hon. returned to Gloucester Place from Downing Street, where he had been closely engaged. His time had not been wasted, however, and they left London for St. Petersburg by the evening express, provided with all the power her Majesty's Government could confer upon the Right Hon. Charles Dexter Dunbar.

From Riga Olga had been sent to St. Petersburg, whence, after a brief detention in the political prison, she

had been banished to Kara, once more by administrative order. Ten days after she had left the fortress to join the train of convicts doomed to that fearful march, Lesley and his father were posting along the great Siberian road with an order for her release under the imperial seal.

They stopped only at the posts to change horses. From time to time they passed long, unsightly buildings, which Lesley regarded with a shudder, knowing from Olga's well-remembered description that they were the pestilential *kameras* in which the convicts were herded at night like cattle. After passing the first he could have indented the rest with his eyes shut by the reek of corruption swept by the wind across their path. And it was in these that his hopeless and unfriended wife had rested with her burden of sorrow !

At length Lesley, for ever straining his eyes on the road before them, descried a dark line upon the white snow, and questioning the driver learnt that it was, beyond doubt, the train of convicts. Gradually they overtook it, and with a wildly beating heart, Lesley scanned the lumbering carts and gangs of slowly marching men and women, with the terrible hope of distinguishing Olga. Three mounted officers brought up the rear. The driver of the *droszki* overtaking them pulled up, and the Right Hon. asking for the commandant, one of these officers threw away his cigarette, touched his cap, and took the papers presented. He glanced at them, saluted Lesley and his father again with grave courtesy, and said in French—

"I am afraid you are too late, gentlemen. The day before yesterday Mrs. Dunbar could go no further. We left her in the infirmary of No. 13 station. You *may* find her there ; but"—he shrugged his shoulder in significant silence as he returned the papers.

They waited to hear no more, but turned back at once towards St. Petersburg. It was evening when they reached the *étape* where Olga had been left. After a hasty examination of their papers they were led in ominous silence into the infirmary. A doctor coming from one of the wards met the little party.

He exchanged a few sentences with the governor, bowed to the Englishmen, and leading them into the ward, said—

"Mrs. Dunbar still lives, but I fear she will never

return to England. The end is near ; her mind is wandering ; she speaks nothing but English."

She lay in the narrow bed with her great, melancholy eyes fixed vacantly upon the nurse who sat beside her. She recognized neither Lesley nor his father ; but when Lesley, taking the nurse's place, sank on his knees and laid his face to hers, she passed her thin fingers over his head, touching the curl by his ear lightly, and said, with whispering earnestness—

"Who—who is it?"

"I—I—Lesley, your husband, dear love. Come to take you home," he answered, choking down his grief.

She twined her arm about his neck, kissing him again and again, with little broken exclamations of tender joy between.

"I knew you would come and fetch me," she said. "I knew you would find me though I have lost my way and strayed so far. Dear Lesley ! But the time has seemed so long here without you that, despite my faith, I almost feared you would never find me again. It is getting so late, dear—the mist is rising from the river—it is spreading—spreading. I found some convolvulus just now ; the flowers were closing. The kingfisher whistled over the water : but he has been silent a long while. Even the swallows are gone, and the midges have ceased to hum. Do you think you can find the way and lead me back?"

"Yes—dear love—yes."

"We will have a fire in the little room to-night—it is getting cold. I cannot feel that I am walking—my feet are so numbed ; it is as if I were floating along. But you are here—my husband—dear Lesley. I wanted to sleep among the rushes under the willows ; but I kept awake, knowing you would come. And you are here. . . Why your dear cheek is wet ; you are crying. Why?"

"I am too happy."

"And I as well. See, I am crying too—I have wanted to cry so long—I love this country so much—and the little cottage. Why does happiness move us so, love?—a lunset or a closed flower? The flower will open again to-morrow—the sun will rise again."

"Oh, I pray God that they may !"

"I am tired now, love ; my eyes are heavy. Let me sleep with my arm about your neck—with my hand in

yours. Lesley—Lesley—may I sleep always at Pangbourne?"

He could not speak for the passionate despair that welled up from his heart. When she again opened her lips the words came drowsily and slow.

"Good-night, my love," she murmured tenderly. Then after an interval she added, her voice fading away almost to a sigh. "It is quite dark now. But the sun will rise again."

Her eyes closed. She fell asleep with a smile on her cheek, never to wake again.

Lesley kept that last promise, and Olga still sleeps in Pangbourne; and in springtime the bulbs she planted in the border under the terrace make a patch of bright color on her grave to cheer the sad with a promise of new joy.

For years they lived apart—Lesley and Evelyn—he a widower, she calling herself an old maid.

"My flirting days are over," she said to him one day when they met.

"But the old love—does that exist no more?" he asked.

And her answer to that question led to their marriage. For him also Olga's promise has been realised—the sun has risen again.





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